

**Inspection of Northumberland BCU
Northumbria Police
February 2005**



CONTENTS

	page
Introduction	1
Overview	3
Northumberland BCU.....	4
Part One – Leadership	6
The BCU Management Team	6
Strategic Management	8
Partnerships	8
Operational Management	11
Demand Management	14
Organisational Culture	15
Communications	15
Complaints	16
Working Relationships	17
Resource Management	17
Administration	17
Financial Management	18
Health and Safety	18
Absence Management	19
Training and Development	21
Personal Development Review (PDR)	21
Estates	22
Special Constabulary	22
Police Community Support Officers	23
Part Two – Performance	24
Performance Management and Accountability.....	24
Performance Management Structures	24
Intelligence-led Policing	25
Briefing Systems	29
BCU Performance	30
Crime Data Analysis	30
Crime Reduction	31
Crime Investigation	33
Detection Plan.....	35
Forensic Investigation Team	36
Summary.....	36
Recommendations	38

Introduction

1. Between 28 February and 4 March 2005 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary conducted the Inspection of Northumberland Basic Command Unit (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 to 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'. 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, which 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 Northumbria Police local policing is delivered through an area command structure.

Overview

1. The Northumbria Police area covers approximately 5,553 square kilometres, serving a population of over 1,381,000. The resident minority ethnic population is estimated to be in the region of 37,000 based on the 2001 census figures.
2. At the time of the BCU Inspection, the Force had an establishment of 4,083 police officers and 1,708 police staff.
3. Since the start of 2004, the Force has been in the implementation phase of a widespread restructuring programme entitled 'Public Service and Performance Review' (PSPR), the main aims of which are:

Improved service

The vision is to build upon current success and equip all staff to provide an improved service to the public at a local level. This is fully supported by the Northumbria Police Authority.

Partnerships

To build strong links with partner agencies that will assist Northumbria Police to deliver an improved policing service to the community.

NIM/Problem solving

Resources should be more focused and better deployed through improved intelligence and problem solving.

Local policing

Each area command will have police teams led by community inspectors responsible for policing in their local communities. This form of policing is concerned with local officers being visible, accessible and providing reassurance, supported by headquarters departments.

Bureaucracy

Cutting bureaucracy to ensure more time is available to front line officers for patrol and community engagement.

Performance

Enabling Northumbria Police to achieve the highest levels of performance.

4. The restructuring saw the Force reconfigure from 15 BCUs to six, commencing on 1 April 2004. One advantage of the change is that all boundaries are coterminous with CDRP and local authority designations.
5. Northumbria Police is headed by the chief officer group, which has responsibility for the strategic direction and control of the Force. The team is led by the Chief Constable, and he is supported by a deputy chief constable, four assistant chief constables and a director of finance and central services.

6. The following are agreed as the strategic priorities of the Force:

- To reduce crime and disorder and make communities safer;
- to release the potential of Force personnel;
- to improve the quality of life through working in partnership with the community and public, private and voluntary bodies; and
- to ensure that all activities support front line policing.

7. The annual revenue budget for Northumbria Police for 2004/05 was set at £249,810,000. Comparatively little is currently devolved to BCU control within the Force, although this position is changing with the devolvement of police staff salaries from 1 April 2005.

Northumberland BCU

8. Northumberland area command was formed on 1 April 2004 when the former north, south west and south east Northumberland area commands were amalgamated.

9. The area command covers approximately 5,013 square kilometres stretching from the Scottish border in the north to the Durham border in the south, from the Cumbrian border in the west and across to the North Sea in the east. It is the largest BCU in England. The population of 307,250 residents is equally divided between the south east and the rest of Northumberland.

10. The south east of Northumberland (Blyth Valley and Wansbeck) is predominantly an urban industrial area which has seen its fortunes suffer in recent years with the decline of the mining industry and the ports. This has brought with it deprivation, and crime and disorder problems are prominent in some areas. The other parts of Northumberland are rural in nature with a number of market towns. Crime and disorder are less prominent problems and community relations are particularly strong, although it is very likely that the hunting legislation may test that relationship.

11. Northumberland has a two-tier local authority structure with Northumberland County Council and six district councils of Berwick upon Tweed, Alnwick, Tynedale, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth and Wansbeck. In addition, there are 144 parish councils.

12. The area is one of outstanding natural beauty with many historical attractions that bring nearly two million visitors each year especially during the summer months when the population of Northumberland increases significantly. There are a number of holiday cottages and camping sites in the area and the popularity of shopping and the nightlife are growing.

13. The main employment following the demise of mining is agriculture, forestry, light industry and tourism.

14. The demographic differences and the diverse geography within the BCU area have produced a complex policing environment placing differing demands upon the service.

15. The footprint for policing Northumberland is the established eleven sectors to which the vast majority of the BCU resources are devolved, establishing a very strong community base in each area.

16. At the time of the Inspection there were 629 police officers and 106 police staff within the BCU. There were 39 special constables and 8 PCSOs (soon to be 12) supporting the BCU. Devolved budgets (which exclude police and police staff salaries) amount to approximately £1.5m for 2004/05.

17. During the BCU Inspection week, the team interviewed over 100 members of staff at all ranks and grades. Members of the Northumbria Police Authority and a cross-section of partner agencies were seen. A number of reality checks and data gathering exercises were performed during this period, including discussions with staff at outlying police stations, the intelligence unit and the custody suite. Both Force-wide communications rooms were visited and all headquarters functional heads interviewed prior to the BCU Inspection. The process concluded with a detailed debrief to the BCU Commander and his senior management team (SMT), followed by a similar meeting with the deputy chief constable.

18. The inspection team would like to express its thanks to the BCU Commander and his staff for the courtesy and assistance afforded them during the course of the Inspection. In particular, the constructive participation and the helpful nature of the BCU staff at all ranks and grades is a credit to the management team.

Part One: Leadership

The BCU Management Team

The Commander

1.1 The chief superintendent has 28 years' service and was appointed Commander at Northumberland BCU on its restructure from three BCUs to one in April 2004. Immediately before appointment to his current post he held the position of BCU Commander of south west Northumberland and for six years before that was the BCU Commander at Sunderland City. He has a wide range of policing experience within Northumbria Police including crime manager at the former Newcastle City BCU and working within the Chief Constable's staff office. Recent training includes health and safety and diversity.

Superintendent (Operational Policing)

1.2 The postholder has responsibility for operational policing within Northumberland BCU. He has 27 years' service and was the BCU Commander in north Northumberland before the amalgamation of the three BCU's. He has previously held positions as operations manager at Newcastle West BCU, superintendent (communications) at headquarters and has worked in the Chief Constable's staff office. He has also undertaken a secondment at a national police training centre and holds a number of external qualifications including an MBA and an advanced diploma in education and training.

Superintendent (Operations Support)

1.3 The superintendent (operations support) has 27 years' police service commencing with the Metropolitan Police during which he gained experience on secondment to the Prince of Wales business leaders' forum, HMIC and the Home Office. Whilst serving with Northumbria Police he has worked in the headquarters community safety department, criminal justice, and the former Gateshead East BCU. He holds a masters degree in manpower studies (personnel management).

Community Chief Inspectors

1.4 The BCU command has two uniformed chief inspectors - both designated a community portfolio and between them sharing geographical responsibility for Northumberland's eleven sectors.

1.5 One chief inspector is responsible for Wansbeck, Castle Morpeth, Alnwick and Berwick. He has 22 years' service in a variety of uniform roles including performance review and inspectorate and chief inspector (operations) in the former north Northumberland BCU.

1.6 The other chief inspector is responsible for Blyth Valley and Tynedale. He has 22 years' service, commencing with the Metropolitan Police. His experience includes performance review and inspectorate, motor patrols, central support unit and professional standards. He was previously the operations chief inspector in south east BCU. At the time of the Inspection this officer was not available in the BCU and the role was being undertaken by an acting chief inspector. She has 19 years' service, having been an inspector for nine years. She has worked primarily in uniform serving at Blyth, Cramlington, Houghton le Spring, Washington, Gosforth and Berwick. She

has also worked in the following headquarters departments: training, recruiting, force inspectorate (during which she was seconded to the Home Office for three months), and professional standards.

Detective Chief Inspector (Crime)

1.7 The detective chief inspector has responsibility for crime investigation. He has 20 years' service performing both uniform and CID duties. His experience includes an attachment to a thematic inspection of crime desks and lead inspector on problem solving. He is a trained Force negotiator.

Detective Chief Inspector (Crime Support)

1.8 The detective chief inspector has 19 years' service and was previously the detective inspector in north Northumberland. His service profile is primarily investigative based but has also worked in operations support and training.

Chief Inspector (Criminal Justice and Partnerships)

1.9 The postholder has responsibility for partnership working and criminal justice. He has 22 years' service in uniform, CID and operational support roles. Immediately before taking up his current post he worked within the planning and co-ordination unit at headquarters.

Business Manager

1.10 The postholder joined Northumbria Police in August, 2004 from a management career with the Royal Mail, the Legal Aid Board and Post Office Counters. Part of her previous role was to work as a consultant on change and organisational design and development.

Visibility of the Senior Management Team

1.11 Northumberland BCU covers a large geographic area of some 5,013 square kilometres with eleven sectors and a number of police stations including Berwick and Alnwick to the north (approximately 30 and 60 miles respectively from the BCU headquarters at Bedlington), and Hexham and Haltwhistle to the west (approximately 30 and 50 miles respectively from Bedlington). The SMT acknowledges that its visibility is a major concern and has recently introduced a co-ordinated programme of visits to all stations necessitating each member of the team committing at least one day per month to the programme.

1.12 In addition, sector performance review meetings (see Performance section) and new meetings/communications structures (see Organisational Culture section) should improve visibility of SMT members. During the Inspection a consistent message from staff working in the BCU was that SMT members were not visible and that there was a propensity to communicate and give direction by e-mail.

1.13 Overall, staff had confidence in the SMT, understood the heavy workloads involved in running a large geographic BCU and expressed the view that SMT members are all approachable and supportive. Staff associations expressed the view that members of the SMT were approachable and were positive about diversity issues. However, they feel that police staff in particular were not informed of developments in the BCU and that their uncertainty about their future roles was not well addressed nor communicated.

1.14 Whilst acknowledging the difficulties associated with leading such a large and geographically spread BCU, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary urges SMT members to take every opportunity to ensure that they are visible and accessible to staff. The programmed visits of SMT members to operational stations is welcomed but is relatively new and should be sustained.

Strategic Management

1.15 The BCU Commander has primary responsibility for the strategic development of the BCU, both internally – as leader of the change programme – and externally, with partner agencies. He represents Northumbria Police on the Northumberland strategic partnership and the Northumberland crime and disorder reduction partnership (CDRP).

1.16 During the last ten months the Commander has led the BCU through an intense period of change - restructuring from three separate BCUs to one command servicing the whole of the Northumberland area. One of the main advantages of this change is that the policing boundaries match those of the local authority and this will facilitate more integrated and consistent decision-making at the local strategic levels. Most of the policing structures are determined but work continues to finalise several key issues, particularly police staff structures. The restructuring has clearly consumed a significant proportion of the SMT's time, yet their operational focus remains strong and members are particularly supportive of the new performance review structures that are designed to support BCU operational objectives and make staff accountable for their team and individual performance.

1.17 An 'Area Command Plan' exists setting out broad objectives but it does not provide the necessary detail nor demonstrate how objectives are to be achieved. To date the SMT has relied on an action matrix of issues to be progressed within the BCU. Whilst this matrix clearly identifies both the actions needed to address problems and to whom within the SMT they are ascribed, it is principally reactive in nature.

1.18 Longer term planning in preparation for the 2005/06 BCU business plan is evident. The creation of a BCU business plan represents a significant step forward to provide necessary direction for the BCU over the next 12 months, being an all-inclusive plan outlining strategies and resource usage to achieve intended goals. HMIC was encouraged by the commitment and effort being expended by the SMT in the preparation of this essential new plan.

1.19 There was clear evidence during the Inspection that corporate plans and reviews had been communicated at both the SMT and other supervisory levels and that appropriate action had been identified through the SMT action matrix.

Partnerships

1.20 The inspection team met with a range of partner agencies during the Inspection, including representatives from the seven CDRPs and seven local strategic partnerships (LSPs).

1.21 Northumberland's partnership arrangements are complex in nature due to the size and diversity of the area and the two-tier local government arrangements.

Despite this there was considerable evidence of strong support for partnership working, co-operation and knowledge and understanding of current issues. All partnership meetings were well attended and invariably had appropriate representation by partner agencies, police and police authority members.

1.22 The seven CDRP groups are as follows:

Blyth Valley;
Wansbeck;
Castle Morpeth;
Tynedale (including Hexham, Prudhoe and the Rural West areas);
Berwick;
Alnwick; and
Northumberland County.

1.23 Northumberland County CDRP acts as an advisory/best practice forum for the other six CDRPs, and provides support in relation to administrative matters such as statistical analysis for the community safety audits rather than being strictly a CDRP in its own right. The two community chief inspectors attend their respective geographically based CDRP meetings and the BCU Commander and chief inspector (criminal justice and partnerships) represent the BCU at the overarching Northumberland County CDRP. The drugs action team is to be fully integrated into the partnership arrangements.

1.24 The LSP structure matches that of the CDRP's (one LSP per CDRP) with the Northumberland strategic partnership providing support, guidance and direction (similar to the role of the Northumberland CDRP at that level). The chief inspector (criminal justice and partnerships) attends all meetings, with the BCU Commander attending the overarching Northumberland strategic meeting.

1.25 There is clearly an understanding, evident through a number of discussions recorded in minutes of CDRP meetings, that they recognise the necessity of joint working and co-operation between the CDRP groups in order to best co-ordinate and pool resources. There is concern, particularly by the more rural CDRPs, that impending changes (emerging through the 'Stronger and Safer Communities' arrangements) do not result in essential resources being diverted to the more urban south east area of the county. This concern is clearly a barrier to further amalgamation/rationalisation of CDRP arrangements. At the LSP level there is uncertainty regarding future administration of the new funding and accountability arrangements and this is causing some disquiet.

1.26 The BCU Commander and chief inspector (criminal justice and partnerships) are both active participants and they have a good grasp of the strategic issues facing the partnerships. They understand the need to ensure that BCU interests are fully represented and to ensure that the new funding arrangements are complimentary to the good work being undertaken on community safety rather than a threat if resources were to be diverted to wider council agendas.

1.27 The six CDRPs' 2002-05 community safety strategies align closely to the objectives contained in the BCU's area command plan – see table below ('Yes'

indicates that the BCU objective is specifically mentioned in the respective community safety strategy):

Figure 1: Community Safety Strategies

BCU Plan objectives	Berwick	Alnwick	Tynedale	Wansbeck	Blyth Valley	Castle Morpeth
Burglary		Yes		Yes		Yes
Violent crime	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Theft of/from vehicles		Yes		Yes		
Domestic violence	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
Public safety	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes
Public order	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Criminal damage	Yes		Yes	Yes		Yes
Drugs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Others contained in the CDRP plans: FC = Fear of crime RC = Rural crime	FC RC	FC Victims Offenders Racial crime	FC RC	Theft	FC RC	FC RC

1.28 The six geographic CDRPs are each supported by an action group and a problem solving group (often combined) and these are serviced for the police by the sector inspectors, sergeants and community beat managers (CBMs).

1.29 The strong commitment made by the BCU to attend this number of meetings at all levels is laudable and this is matched by the enthusiasm and strong participation in community safety based initiatives witnessed during the Inspection.

1.30 In particular the following initiatives were seen as impressive:

- The ‘Enough’ project at Berwick and Alnwick - a multi-agency initiative designed to reduce drink and drug related anti-social behaviour through information (posters and radio), education (involving local schools), positive intervention and enforcement.
- The community engagement initiative in the Chevington and Wooler areas, an initiative that is delivered jointly with the Police Authority and part of the Home Office ‘Invest to Save’ project, to ensure meaningful engagement with rural areas that have suffered a degree of deprivation and possible disenchantment with authorities, including the police. This involves maintaining meaningful dialogue with the community by holding regular meetings, distributing newsletters and problem solving initiatives through partner agencies. On a similar theme the BCU Commander is planning to open a number of empty police houses which, in conjunction with the mobile police office, can provide community access points to the police in rural areas.
- Work between Blyth Valley District Council and the BCU’s anti-social behaviour team in dealing with disorderly juveniles and difficult tenants through the use of staged and progressive intervention eventually leading to eviction/ASBOs. In the Blyth Valley area 438 letters were sent to parents during 2004 and there

are currently 43 anti-social behaviour agreements in place (this is the stage before taking them to court for an ASBO). Youth disorder has decreased by almost 12% comparing January to December 2004 with the corresponding period in 2003.

1.31 In the main, District Councils’ commitment to work with the police on community safety and anti-social behaviour was commendable. However, the Inspection Team were disappointed that one District Council (with particular community safety problems) was less engaged and appeared reluctant to fully commit resources. **HMIC urges the chief inspector (community) and sector inspector for this area to better engage this council in sustainable community safety based initiatives.**

Operational Management

1.32 Senior management team roles and responsibilities align to the new corporate area command policing model. In recognition of the unique nature and geography of the BCU, Northumberland has two geographically focused community chief inspectors rather than one chief inspector (community) and one chief inspector (operations), which is common in the other Northumbria BCUs. This is entirely appropriate and appears to work well particularly as the postholders are very committed and supportive of each other.

1.33 The sergeant and constable establishments of the BCU are 88 and 510 respectively divided between the disciplines as follows:

Figure 2: Distribution of Sergeants & Constables			
Response & Community Policing	Operations Support	Crime	Support
66%	14%	17%	3%

1.34 Northumberland has a clear community focused policing structure based on eleven sectors. Each is headed by an inspector who is responsible for all resources within that sector, (including community beat managers – constables and sergeants, detective officers, field intelligence officers, response officers and sector based police staff). Sector inspectors have a high level of autonomy to deliver tactical solutions - being held accountable for performance by the BCU Commander through a quarterly performance review process. The format for community policing in Northumberland is highly valued and recognised as the basis for the Force’s recently introduced generic BCU community policing structures.

1.35 Five response (24/7) inspectors support the sector inspectors by managing the more serious spontaneous operations and taking responsibility for statutory duties such as those appropriate to the Police and Criminal Justice Act and the Regulatory Investigative Powers Act (RIPA).

1.36 Operational proactive capability is provided by:

- A small burglary team working in the south east of the BCU;

- Area support group (territorial support, motor patrols and dog section); and
- Target offender unit (discussed in more detail under ‘Intelligence-led Policing’).

1.37 These resources are primarily deployed against target and problem profiles. In the main, this is to the south east of the BCU. The deployment is discussed in greater detail under ‘Intelligence-led Policing’ (see paragraph 2.11).

1.38 Officers in the most rural areas, whilst fully understanding the need to prioritise policing activity on the busiest areas, can on occasions feel exposed and vulnerable.

1.39 All response (24/7) inspectors are based and report for duty at Ashington police station in the south east of the BCU. Sector inspectors provide support to the response inspectors as necessary. Sector inspectors service an agreed roster whereby, in rotation, they provide additional ‘on cover’ inspector support between 0700-1700 hours and 1700-0300 hours each day. When ‘on cover’ they only become involved in spontaneous incident management or decision-making once the response inspector is unable to deal with the issue raised - rather than them sharing these responsibilities from the outset. Whenever the ‘on cover’ sector inspector is from one of the more rural areas, staff from the outlying sectors have few problems gaining access to them. However, if the ‘on cover’ duty inspector is from a sector in the south east area, rural officers can realistically only expect inspector support by telephone for at least the first hour of an incident occurring. This is due to the 24/7 response inspector invariably being committed in the south east, i.e. in the same geographic area as the supporting ‘on cover’ sector inspector.

Recommendation 1

Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team review the management arrangements in respect of rural officers particularly at times of demanding or critical incident handling.

1.40 Before amalgamation to the one BCU there were four operational custody suites in the Northumberland area. Since the restructure there has been one 24/7 custody facility servicing the whole area which is shortly to become the responsibility of the administration of justice department rather than the BCU. At the time of the Inspection, this change was about to be fully implemented and there were no issues of concern raised with the new provision at Bedlington police station. The facility, its resource levels, and training is professionally and appropriately managed.

1.41 The newly introduced management of offenders programme is particularly well appreciated and was positively commented upon by operational staff. This is a Home Office supported initiative that is funded through the ‘workforce modernisation’ scheme. It involves using fully (PEACE) trained police staff to undertake interviews and file compilation for lower categories of crime including

minor thefts, public order and criminal damage offences to release operational officers' time. There are appropriate safeguards to ensure operational staff are not deskilled.

1.42 Twelve police staff investigating officers and one supervisor work within Bedlington custody suite under the line management of administration of justice's custody investigation support unit. Initial results from quality monitoring of taped interviews and paperwork is very encouraging - 99% of paperwork submitted by CIOs is accepted on first submission, for example. The initiative is to be fully evaluated by the Force.

1.43 The sergeant in the custody investigation support unit oversees the bail management system and undertakes five-weekly audits of all those prisoners bailed to return to Bedlington police station. The audit includes 'fail to appear' bail and 'not yet known disposals'. Operational officers receive appropriate reminders to progress bail enquiries and further checks are built in by the unit to ensure completion and progression. Since the introduction of the audit, the numbers of those who are overdue returning to answer bail have fallen and remain low at approximately 20 per five-week audit cycle. **HMIC compliments the managers of the custody investigation support unit for their commitment and drive for establishing and servicing the new bail arrangements and auditing process.**

1.44 In recognition of the distances involved in transporting prisoners from rural areas, Hexham, Alnwick and Berwick police stations have retained part-time custody provision – made available whenever required. In order to open these facilities, the local on duty response sergeant undertakes the role of custody officer. This is far from ideal as examples were given to the inspection team of untrained acting sergeants undertaking this role and, on occasions, sergeants attending incidents in which they became involved only then to return to the police station to accept a prisoner from that same incident. The serious consequences, including the potential lack of probity and integrity in respect of an investigation, make this situation untenable. The inspection team also had concerns about the lack of CCTV provision in these outlying custody suites, particularly in those cells designated for vulnerable prisoners.

1.45 In addition, there has been an ongoing problem securing medical services for the custody facilities at Alnwick and Berwick. On occasions this has necessitated transporting ill/injured prisoners or victims of crime (requiring medical examination) to the Bedlington facilities – a round trip of approximately 120 miles. This is problematic from both a custody/victim viewpoint and also leaves rural officers exposed as their colleagues are abstracted to undertake such long journeys.

Recommendation 2

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team review all aspects of custody in the rural areas, to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

Demand Management

1.46 Several operational officers raised concerns that, since the introduction of the customer services desk, they had been required to attend all crime scenes, no matter how minor the crime being reported to them. The customer services desk has recently been established from the 'crime desk' and renamed to ensure the important change in emphasis. Before the establishment of the customer services desk, crime desk staff would ring back victims of lower level crime and take all details over the telephone negating the requirement for operational officers to attend the scene. The SMT informed the inspection team that this was a deliberate change in policy in the interests of high levels of service provision and investigation. Crime is low in the Northumberland area and this is an appropriate and affordable level of support to all victims of crime. **Some operational staff do not understand the reasoning for such a policy change and HMIC urges the BCU command team to ensure that the rationale for this is fully explained to them.**

1.47 Due to the geography of the BCU it is not always the best use of valuable resources for scenes of crime officers to attend all crime scenes in the rural areas due to the travelling distances involved. The BCU SMT therefore introduced scenes of crime training for staff in rural areas to allow officers to undertake basic scene examinations and to ensure that the community has its crimes thoroughly investigated. This is received favourably by the rural communities and a number of forensic samples have been recovered. **It is too early to make a full assessment of the benefits of this initiative but HMIC applauds the intention of the BCU command team in providing cost effective yet appropriate services to the rural communities.**

1.48 The BCU is currently piloting the 'Making it Count' initiative for the Force. The purpose of this initiative is to ensure that whenever a victim of crime reports an incident, it is thoroughly investigated and that offenders are appropriately recorded for future reference. In order to achieve this, a crime continues to be investigated despite a victim refusing to co-operate with the police by either not recording a formal statement of evidence or by withdrawing the complaint. In such circumstances, following completion of the investigation, positive action is taken and it is likely that the offender will be formally cautioned rather than recording the incident as 'no further action – complainant declines to prosecute'. The majority of incidents that fall within the scheme are domestic violence related offences and less serious assaults, often related to late evening drinking although other serious matters such as sexual offences are dealt with under the scheme (indictable only offences being considered by CPS before finalisation).

1.49 The principles and intentions of the initiative are laudable, however there are two areas that require further consideration, as follows:

- A number of operational staff interviewed during the Inspection were cynical about the objectives of the initiative and did not really understand the benefits to the victims or the ethical approach involved in improving investigation. They invariably viewed it merely as a method to increase sanctioned detections to improve the BCU's performance. As a consequence, they

resented the additional work involved and indicated that they did not value the initiative.

- The two detective inspectors responsible for investigation within the BCU subject the resultant files to meticulous examination for probity and evidential quality before a 'detected crime' can be recorded. They then return those that are not to the requisite standard to the officers' inspectors. The quality of the files submitted to the detective inspectors was considered by the inspection team to be extremely poor – several contained badly photocopied pro forma statements of evidence of questionable value. This quality assurance work is consuming a disproportionate amount of the detective inspectors' valuable time and experience.

1.50 Whilst accepting that the 'Making it Count' initiative is to be subject to full evaluation by the Force, HMIC urges the BCU command team to ensure its objectives are fully understood by operational staff, particularly the benefits that accrue from a thorough investigation and appropriate recording of offenders details. In addition, file quality must be addressed before submission to the detective inspectors, to ensure these valuable resources are used to best effect.

Organisational Culture

Communications

1.51 Day-to-day communication in relation to individual roles and responsibilities is good and the meeting structures recently introduced to make staff aware of BCU and Force developments are mostly appropriate and necessary.

1.52 A comprehensive performance review regime has recently been introduced (see Performance section later). As a consequence, there is a strong performance culture in the BCU and those interviewed were well aware of BCU objectives and performance against targets.

1.53 There are regular SMT meetings to discuss progress on the SMT action matrix, and a similar meeting with the wider management team consisting of inspectors and equivalent police staff and above. These meetings are intentionally timetabled to follow the Force policy group to ensure that those attending are aware of pertinent corporate issues.

1.54 The BCU Commander chairs the area command conference attended by heads of specialist functions (to provide an update on issues pertinent to their areas of responsibility), area group support staff, the Police Federation, UNISON, sector representatives, youth offending team members and crime prevention officers.

1.55 Inspectors hold regular meetings with their operational staff and some sector sergeants hold subsequent meetings with their staff, including police staff, but not all sergeants do so.

1.56 Whilst the majority of police officers appeared well informed, during the Inspection it was evident that few police staff members, particularly those working

from stations other than Bedlington, were aware of developments in either the Force or the BCU and many had little comprehension of the reasons for recent changes. Many police staff members feel threatened by the impending police staff restructuring as some consider that their existing post may not exist, they are likely to have to change role and possibly move to another police station.

1.57 Immediately before her secondment to a headquarters major planning team, one of the BCU’s support services managers had instigated meetings with police staff across the BCU in order to keep them informed of developments, but this has not been sustained. In addition, it was suggested during the Inspection that a BCU newsletter is to be published. This would undoubtedly be welcomed by staff and would be particularly useful if it were published on the intranet to allow timely viewing by all staff.

Recommendation 3

Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team review the BCU communication strategy to ensure that all staff, in particular police staff members, are informed of impending changes, including anticipated benefits as a consequence of these developments.

Complaints

1.58 The table below illustrates the number of complaints for the last two financial years for Northumberland both in terms of the individual areas (as they were at the time of the data being collected) and as a single BCU:

Figure 3: Complaints

2002/03	Number of Complaints	Complaints per 1000 officers	Complaints finalised	% Complaints finalised	Complaints substant.	% Complaints substant.
North Northumberland	29	246.81	29	100.00%	0	0.00%
South East Northumberland	29	100.3	36	124.14%	0	0.00%
South West Northumberland	11	92.71	14	127.27%	2	14.29%
Combined BCU	69	134	79	114%	2	3%
2003/04						
North Northumberland	17	128.79	23	135.29%	0	0.00%
South East Northumberland	35	115.42	45	128.57%	3	6.67%
South West Northumberland	15	119.8	18	120.00%	0	0.00%
Combined BCU	67	120	86	128%	3	4.5%

1.59 Overall, Northumberland experienced a very slight reduction in the number of complaints recorded between 2002/03 and 2003/04 and, due to the increased

establishment, a reduction in complaints per 1,000 officers from 134 to 120 was achieved. Relatively low numbers of officers working in Northumberland BCU were subject to complaint during 2003/04.

1.60 Consideration of the data in respect of the separate (pre-amalgamation) areas indicates that complaints reduced by over 40% in North Northumberland but increased slightly in the other two areas over the period under consideration.

1.61 Northumbria professional standards department informs the BCU whenever an officer receives three complaints within a 12 month period, and such officers are seen to ensure that there are no ongoing problems and emphasise the importance of such matters to these staff.

Working relationships

1.62 Working relationships are generally very positive, professional and supportive. The sector structure is intended to galvanise each of the sectors' resources into an inclusive team under the leadership and direction of the sector inspector and, in the main, this works very well. Key positions across the BCU are occupied by committed staff and in particular the sector inspectors and 24/7 response inspectors appear to work well together (with the exception of the 'on cover' arrangements outlined in the Operations Management section above).

1.63 Leadership by sergeants and inspectors is a particular strength of this BCU. They impressed the inspection team with their enthusiasm and the way they play an active role in driving necessary changes forward. The BCU Commander has plans to better engage detective sergeants in the sector/community policing model and the inspection team agrees that this represents a positive step forward.

1.64 The sector performance structure provides a sense of competition between the eleven sectors, but the overall impression was that the environment was one of support rather than this being negative or destructive in nature. Those sector inspectors interviewed were concerned that the NIM tactical tasking and co-ordinating meeting (TTCG) no longer brings them all together and that meetings chaired by a member of the SMT are the only times that they can debate issues as a group (see paragraph 2.12). **HMIC suggests that the BCU command team consider establishing a less formal 'information sharing/good practice' meeting of inspectors in the interests of promulgation of good practice and operational effectiveness.**

1.65 Working relationships between police staff and police officers are good but police staff members feel less engaged and informed of developments (as outlined in the Communications section above). This is leading to some tensions, evident at most police stations visited during the Inspection, and could well be a contributory factor in the high levels of sickness discussed later in this report.

Resource Management

Administration

1.66 The new police staff structures appear appropriate to the size of the BCU and the introduction of a business manager strongly supported by two support services managers is a key development. The business manager is extremely enthusiastic,

committed and clearly has a good grasp of the development needed to take the BCU forward.

1.67 The SMT has some concerns that a number of additional resources, such as the area support group and public protection unit, have been decentralised without appropriate administrative support being in place and that this is causing existing staff additional work and anxiety. **HMIC feels that appropriate administrative support is an issue that the SMT should consider as a priority during its deliberations on the 2005/06 BCU business plan and associated financial plan (see Financial Management), particularly given the impending devolution of police staff salary budgets.**

Financial Management

1.68 The BCU has appropriate budgetary provision and is expected to complete the 2004/05 financial year with an overall underspend. Relatively modest overspends in 'call charges', 'technical equipment' and 'specialist equipment' will be incurred but can be offset by far more significant savings in other areas.

1.69 Currently financial management is mainly based on simple forecasting and accounting rather than maximising opportunities to support business objectives through more progressive financial management. The SMT has recognised the need to build a resource plan into the BCU business plan and the intention is to use allocated budget to fully support operational policing and BCU development.

1.70 Financial profiling of sectors is currently being undertaken to inform the new plan and ensure that budgets devolved to each of the sector inspectors are appropriate and manageable. Currently, sector inspectors are allocated an overtime budget but have limited ability to control the use of that budget. Detective inspectors or 24/7 response inspectors can authorise use of that overtime, without first referring to the budget holder, in the event of a serious investigation or spontaneous incident occurring on that sector. During the Inspection, one sector with the highest level of crime and number of spontaneous incidents in the BCU, had its budget expended two months before the conclusion of the financial year. Despite the protestations of the relevant sector inspector, by necessity, further demand was being placed on that overspent budget.

1.71 **HMIC is encouraged by the stated intention and commitment of the BCU command team to develop more robust and effective financial plans in conjunction with the new BCU business plan. Where devolved budgets are appropriate, budget holders must have full control of resource usage and be properly held to account. The business manager's view that a centrally held operational budget for allocation against operational priorities by the tactical tasking and co-ordinating group (TTCG) coupled with contingency funds for spontaneous and serious incidents is appropriate.**

Health and Safety

1.72 Health and safety structures are in place – health and safety risk assessments have been undertaken at all police stations and a health and safety welfare group has been established within the BCU which is chaired by the business manager. There is appropriate representation at these meetings including the staff associations. The

meetings are minuted and actions appropriately ascribed. In addition, an accident reporting database has also been established which is maintained by the support services managers.

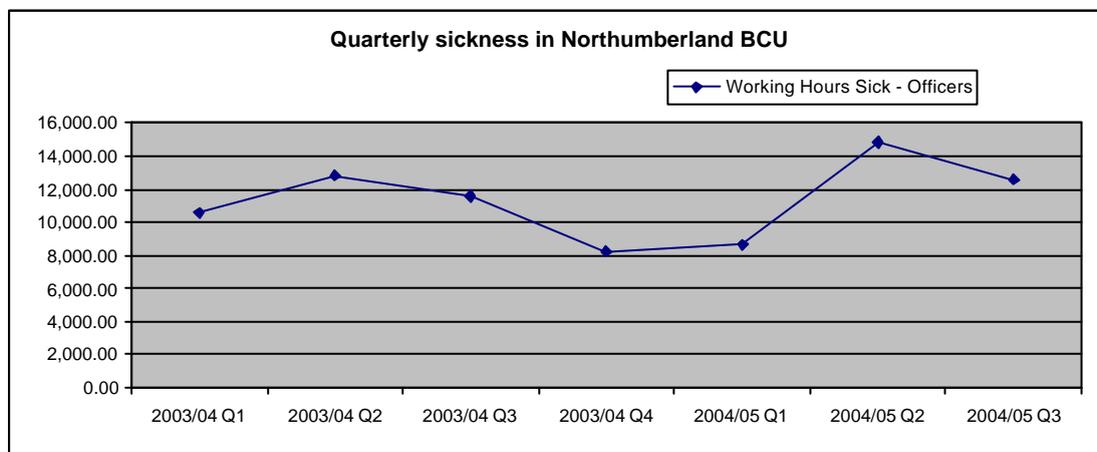
Absence Management

Police Officers

1.73 The sickness rate for police officers in Northumberland BCU (combining the performance of the three previous BCUs) during 2003/04 was commendable. The figure of 7.83 days per officer represents a 26% decrease in sickness compared to the previous year, ranking the BCU third in the Force (almost one day less than the Force average) and third in the most similar BCU group (MSBCU).

1.74 Consideration of more recent sickness absence data indicates that the sickness rate per officer has been maintained at this low level, i.e. 5.45 days per officer for the part year period April to December 2004 and a projected 7.27 days per officer for the 2004/05 year.

1.75 Whilst acknowledging that overall sickness absence for police officers is low, short-term sickness is showing a significant increase on last year. In addition, the chart below indicates that the working hours lost in Northumberland BCU as a result of police officer sickness peaked in the second quarter of 2004/05 before dropping back slightly in the third quarter. The low levels of sickness absence in the fourth quarter of 2003/04 and the first quarter of 2004/05 may be disguising the start of a steady rise in sickness and the BCU SMT should monitor this situation carefully.

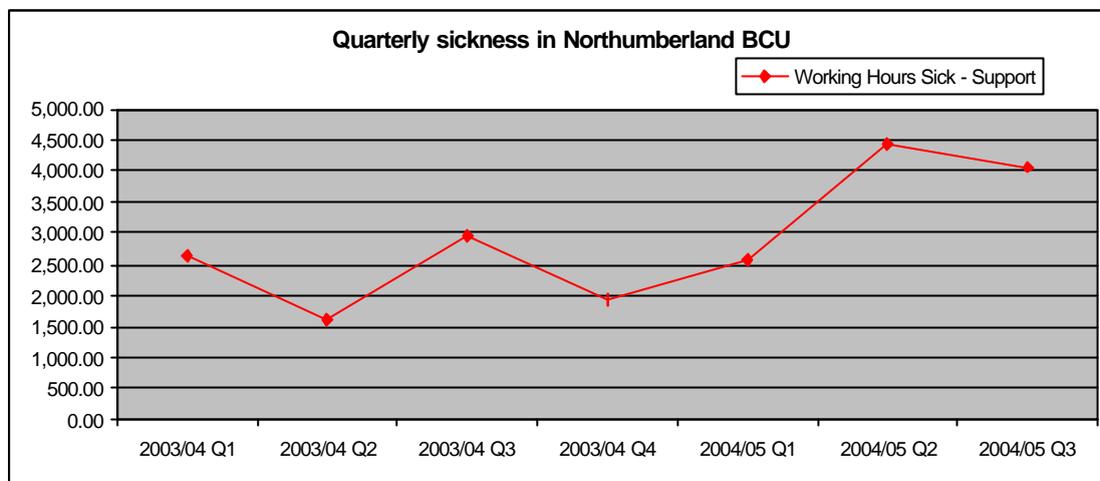


Police Staff

1.76 Sickness absence per police staff employee was higher than that of police officers during 2003/04 at 11.33 days. It was slightly above the Force average (11.2 days) and almost 1.4 days higher than the MSBCU average (9.9 days per employee).

1.77 Consideration of more recent absence data indicates that the sickness rate is increasing for police staff members in Northumberland BCU and is of concern. Police staff absence has risen to 14.3 days for the period April to December 2004 and informed projections made by the Force indicate that it is likely to reach 19 days for the 2004/05 financial year. Long-term sickness has increased by over 60% compared

to last year. Northumberland has the highest police staff sickness in the Force and is nine days higher per staff member than the Force average. The graph below illustrates the upward trend in police staff sickness particularly since the start of the 2004/05 financial year.



1.78 During the Inspection it was clear that considerable work is being undertaken by the local health management group, chaired by the superintendent (support), on managing back-to-work, recuperative programmes and there is ongoing liaison with occupational health. However, the minutes of the last meeting held on 4 February 2005 indicate that no fewer than 16 members of staff (police officers and police staff) were absent through stress, depression or anxiety.

1.79 In all, 35 police officers' cases were reviewed at the local health management group on 4 February but only eight police staff cases were considered. During interviews several supervisors indicated that welfare contact and back-to-work interviews would be conducted in all cases involving police officers but were not as certain regarding compliance with the absence management procedures in relation to police staff. More than one member of police staff seen indicated that they had not received such support when they were on sickness absence.

Recommendation 4

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team review its application of absence management policies and procedures to ensure that police staff absence is subject to the same degree of supervisory attention, welfare support and information analysis as that of police officer sickness. In addition, the BCU command team should undertake a full review of sickness to establish whether there are underlying causes to such a large increase in police staff sickness and identify appropriate remedial action.

Training and Development

1.80 The superintendent (operations) chairs the local training priorities group which convenes bi-monthly to determine those bids for training (submitted on behalf of staff by inspectors) to be progressed. In order to inform their decisions the BCU has determined skill profiles for each sector. The superintendent accepts that there is an imbalance of skills between the sectors and indicates that this will be addressed through reprofiling shortly.

1.81 The training budget for police staff is inadequate - only £6,000 was allocated for the 2004/05 financial year. The lack of training opportunities is likely to result in less than effective use of these valuable staff, affect morale if training requests are continually refused due to lack of funding, and leave the BCU short of skills as staff move into new posts following restructuring. **HMIC urges the BCU command team to review the training budget in relation to police staff as part of the 2005/06 financial business plan.**

1.82 The BCU's probationer tutor unit is based at Ashington and consists of one sergeant and six constables with a further two tutors as reserve. The current remit for the unit is to oversee development of probationers throughout their two year training period. This remit is currently being reviewed and it is anticipated that from April 2005 the tutor unit will have responsibility for officers from the commencement of their employment until the end of week 33. From that point onwards the responsibility for their development is passed to dedicated area training officers who are responsible to headquarters training department but based within the BCU.

1.83 The area training officers deliver a structured training programme for all uniformed officers within the BCU and respond to the request for training support from the local training priority group.

1.84 The area training officers have no administrative support at present and the additional responsibilities associated with probationer development will put a strain on their capacity to deliver effectively. This should be addressed within the review of administrative support as highlighted earlier in this report.

Personal Development Review (PDR)

1.85 Fifty performance development reviews for staff working within the Northumberland BCU were examined during the Inspection. Overall there were good links with BCU priorities and the sector review cycle. They were timely with some development and training objectives identified. The Force acknowledges that it has some difficulty with the current PDR process but, in the main, police officers in Northumberland are committed to the personal development review philosophy. Police staff did not value the current system, the majority considering it irrelevant to them or their role.

1.86 The Force's recent poster campaign firstly, to inform staff openly and honestly that the current system is not working and subsequently, to positively build on this approach to gain staff confidence and support for the new system once available, was not understood by those interviewed. A number of line managers interviewed felt that the initial stages of the poster campaign were undermining their attempts to review officers' performance and to give them the direction necessary for their development.

Estates

1.87 With the exceptions of Morpeth and Blyth police stations, the standard of the estate in Northumberland is very high. The SMT is fully aware of the issues at these two stations and improvement bids are progressing appropriately.

1.88 Bedlington, although a modern police station is now accommodating more staff than originally intended due to BCU restructuring and it becoming the new BCU headquarters. Building work is ongoing to convert the gymnasium into office space and the SMT has made rational and pragmatic decisions about who needs to be accommodated at Bedlington and who would be better working from neighbouring stations, to alleviate these problems.

Special Constabulary

1.89 There are just under 40 Special Constabulary members supporting the BCU including two area managers and two section officers. Each member is expected to undertake an average of four hours' duty per week. The inspection team was very impressed by the attitude and commitment of those interviewed, several of whom had been actively supporting the BCU for over 10 years and one officer having 28 years' active service. Several are fully trained on independent patrol and have driving authorities. Special constables felt valued by operational colleagues and stated that there was a good rapport.

1.90 Those interviewed had an expectation that the BCU tutor unit will take responsibility for the Special Constabulary in the near future and they felt this represents a positive development in ensuring that they are fully engaged in operational policing. At present their attendance is predominantly in response to specific requests from a sector or individual officer whom they know, and this request is invariably to cover shortages rather than as a result of pre-planned or organised policing activity.

1.91 Special constables train weekly but they have concerns that the new centralised arrangements (two venues) are to be held on the same evening rather than providing more flexibility by running on two different evenings in the week. More flexible arrangements would make it easier for these officers to attend as they could better accommodate the demands of their regular employment.

1.92 In addition to the new training arrangements, the main areas of concern cited were:

- Special constables have difficulty accessing radios when they attend for duty as they are locked away and it requires a sergeant to allocate one to them. At times they have to wait some time for a sergeant to be available only to discover that the acting sergeant concerned cannot access the radio database necessary to ascribe the radio to them. Whilst fully understanding the necessity for security of a nationally encrypted radio system, those special constables interviewed felt 'belittled' by this situation.

- Allocation of 'pool' body armour is causing problems as plates are often not available in sector stations or if available, they are invariably the wrong size. Some special constables have informally inherited 'personal issue' body armour from police officer colleagues who have themselves received updated replacements but this situation is far from ideal. The inspection team was informed that sufficient sets of body armour exist within the BCU but there has been a 'asset management' problem rather than a shortage of this essential equipment.
- Special constables are not issued with high visibility coats nor fleece jackets, unlike their regular colleagues and police community support officers (PCSOs), and they feel that this is important equipment for them to undertake their role.

1.93 HMIC urges the BCU management team to review the issues raised by the Special Constabulary. In particular, accessibility of the training day should be addressed with headquarters and the radio and body armour problems should be resolved quickly. In addition, the deployment of special constables is ad hoc and should be reviewed to ensure more effective use of these valuable volunteers.

Police Community Support Officers

1.94 Eight PCSOs are currently working within Northumberland BCU with a further four being appointed at the time of the Inspection. The eight appointed officers are stationed at the outer sectors, two each at Hexham, Prudhoe, Alnwick and Berwick. Of the additional four being appointed, two will be allocated to Blyth and a further two to Berwick (to make a total of four PCSOs at this station). An additional twelve PCSOs are planned for the BCU this year.

1.95 All members of staff seen during the Inspection spoke highly of PCSOs, including members of the Special Constabulary who were looking forward to working closely with them.

1.96 There was a consensus of opinion that initial training constitutes the minimum necessary to undertake the role and that it could be improved. This is acknowledged as a Force issue.

Part Two: Performance

Performance Management and Accountability

Performance Management Structures

2.1 There are a number of mechanisms by which BCU commanders in Northumbria are held to account. The headquarters performance review team circulates biweekly data in respect of the area command. On a six weekly basis, the Force policy group is convened, chaired by the Chief Constable, and attendees include all department heads and BCU commanders. On a weekly basis, the assistant chief constable (operations) meets with BCU commanders to discuss exceptional performance (based on iQuanta data). There is no formal agenda and minutes are not recorded.

2.2 Annually, a chief officer formally institutes an inspection of each BCU, conducted by the Force Inspectorate. The BCU Commander then draws up a development/action plan that is subject to a more detailed review by the relevant chief officer three months later. A formal inspection was conducted for Northumberland in October 2004.

2.3 At Northumberland SMT meetings the superintendent (operations) outlines BCU performance in relation to the area command plan targets. This is then discussed together with a review of progress against the development/action matrix.

2.4 The superintendent (operations) chairs a quarterly sector review meeting followed by meetings between the superintendent (operations), DCI, and individual sector inspectors and sergeants. The second level meeting is to determine how best to take forward issues raised at the first meeting relevant to each sector and agree how BCU headquarters can best support them in making necessary improvement. Both the sector inspectors and the sergeants value this meeting and consider it helpful to them in achieving stated objectives.

2.5 These meetings are informed by a series of performance indicators, those provided by headquarters and additional information collated by the customer service unit on both a group and individual basis. Data retrieval by the customer services unit is mainly manual and laborious and would benefit from consideration of improved information technology. The superintendent (operations) is involved in work on the NMIS (national management information system) which he considers will resolve these problems in the longer term.

2.6 On a five weekly basis each sector inspector discusses team performance with their sergeants and subsequently the rest of the staff on the sector. The focus of these meetings is to identify good performance and areas for improvement. The process is underpinned by regular discussions with individuals on their personal performance and this forms part of PDR.

2.7 Area support group, dog section and motor patrols have a similar performance system (team and individual performance) with different measures relevant to their roles. Other specialist units such as the public protection unit are in the process of

developing appropriate measures and a similar performance process is to be implemented in respect of them.

2.8 Charts comparing sector performance in the key performance indicator (PI) categories for the year-to-date are placed on walls of police stations. This data does not include information on crime trends or detection rates and only provides the simplest information about the progress of the BCU. However, the strong sector performance review processes mitigates the lack of such information and the inspection team felt that improved charts, although useful as a ready point of reference, would be unlikely to significantly change operational officers' performance, attitudes or methods of working.

2.9 In the main information collected and analysed during this process was appropriate but had a propensity to measure quantity rather than quality. The inspection team was particularly concerned regarding the measurement of intelligence forms submitted by officers and bids to the TTCG process (these are discussed in more detail under 'Intelligence-led Policing').

2.10 **HMIC congratulates the BCU command team on the introduction of a robust sector performance review process which, although recognised to be in its infancy and requiring refinement and further development, forms the basis of a very effective mechanism to manage BCU, sector and individual performance.**

Intelligence-led Policing

2.11 The strategic threat assessment is produced on a six monthly basis, it follows the Force template and is of a high quality. The resulting control strategy has been in place since October 2004 and has identified five crime areas (burglary other than dwelling, criminal damage, Class A drugs, theft from unattended motor vehicle and youth disorder). These all appear appropriate as this reflects the current performance and crime trends of the BCU.

2.12 The TTCG meeting is chaired by the superintendent (support) and attendees include intelligence unit staff, crime prevention officers, scenes of crime officers and detective and community chief inspectors. Under the current format there is no partnership agency or sector inspector representation at the meeting. Sector inspectors used to attend but this was revised due to the size of the meeting since amalgamation to one BCU, the time it took to complete and the fact that inspectors were travelling some distance to attend.

2.13 The TTCG considers bids for central resource in support of sector based operations. In order that their bids can be considered, sector inspectors submit an outline of proposed operations on a standardised (Level 1 bidding) form. To discuss proposed operations and associated intelligence a meeting is held by the sector inspector with his/her sector team. Due to the timing of the TTCG (biweekly on Tuesday mornings) and the necessity to have bids submitted for consideration by the 'intelligence pre-meeting' on the Monday morning, the sector inspectors' meetings are generally held on the preceding Friday. This precludes that weekend's criminal activity from the bidding process and sector inspectors are rightly unhappy with this arrangement.

2.14 The 'intelligence pre-meeting' is co-ordinated by the intelligence unit and is attended by all field intelligence officers (FIOs) with an open invitation to sector inspectors. This meeting reviews and collates the results against the previous tasking period and discusses new level 1 bids for central resources. **Whilst the benefit of intelligence pre-meetings is recognised, HMIC urges the BCU command team to review its timing and co-ordination in order to better inform the process.**

2.15 The TTCG meeting commences with a PowerPoint presentation by the analyst which summarises findings from the tactical assessment including:

- Performance data;
- overall crime trends; and
- a focus on trends relevant to the control strategy for the BCU.

2.16 The tactical assessment is in line with the Force template headings and, whilst a comprehensive and informative document, it would be enhanced by including clear recommendations.

2.17 The first part of the meeting is followed by discussions under the following headings/themes:

- Review of tasking from previous meetings;
- intelligence updates;
- crime prevention issues; and
- targets, hot spots, crime series and emerging issues.

2.18 These form the structure of the meeting rather than the priorities identified in the control strategy/tactical assessment. The net result is that the discussions are about the themes in isolation, rather than the priorities identified and the full range of tactical options and resources that could be deployed for each priority. The use of the tactical assessment was therefore superficial and represented a wasted opportunity.

2.19 Two recently produced predictive planning documents were provided to support forward planning (a crime prevention year planner and crime trend planner for each sector) but only limited reference was made to them. Whilst it is understood that these documents are new, used correctly they will undoubtedly prove valuable and the inspection team commends their future inclusion in the TTCG discussions.

2.20 The TTCG is primarily utilised by the south east sectors as the inspectors in the more rural sectors recognise that only in exceptional circumstances will they be able to justify central resources being allocated to them because of their relatively low crime and disorder levels. This has resulted in the rural sectors prioritising their own proactive operations outside the TTCG structure using sector resources only. This raises several problems for the BCU:

- The rural sectors are not being held accountable to TTCG for proactive use of resources;
- it is likely that outer sectors will miss the opportunity to properly engage expert support, e.g. target offender unit;

- there is limited co-ordination of activity across sector boundaries; and
- there is no single oversight of operations across the BCU causing difficulties to operational policing. For example, 24/7 inspectors are not aware of all proactive policing across the BCU. This is required to, firstly, guide them to those areas that require inspector support and leadership and secondly, to avoid abstracting officers engaged on proactive operations in one sector when less operationally committed staff may be available in another.

2.21 The BCU's proactive capability is primarily provided by the target offender unit (TOU) and area support group (territorial support, dogs and motor patrols). Although neither team has representation at the meeting, they are both tasked from the TTCG. Their tasks are communicated to them and cascaded to the rest of the BCU by the operational support planning officer based within the intelligence unit.

2.22 The TOU consists of a detective sergeant and five detective constables, exactly half their number before restructuring in April 2004. All staff within the unit are keen to progress the work needed on intelligence packages and are well qualified and equipped to undertake proactive tasks, including surveillance. However they are rarely deployed to best effect due to their limited capacity compared to the volume of tasks allocated, poor quality intelligence packages delivered to them and an emphasis on short-term operations and results rather than longer term surveillance and sustainable impact. They feel that FIOs are unable to produce intelligence to the level required due to extraneous demands being placed on them (see paragraph 2.31) and, as a consequence, they have to do more preliminary work than they ideally should. The net result is that they have even less capacity to move the intelligence forward to the degree necessary to properly support intelligence-led policing.

2.23 The area support group has similar concerns regarding their tasking, often being asked to undertake operations with very limited intelligence and, on occasions arriving to undertake an operation only to find their deployment is no longer required and that supplementary tasking had not been properly considered. They are then often asked to undertake unstructured patrol.

2.24 The intelligence unit for the BCU is located at Bedlington police station in the south east of the area. Due to the large geographic nature of the BCU, several intelligence posts (line managed through the intelligence unit) have been retained at both Berwick and Hexham in an effort to ensure a more locally delivered intelligence service to the rural sectors. These posts consist of both local intelligence officers (LIOs) and local intelligence assistants (LIAs).

2.25 A detective inspector heads the unit supported by a total establishment of one sergeant, three analysts, four local intelligence officers, five local intelligence assistants and a research officer. At the time of the Inspection there were vacancies for an analyst and one part-time local intelligence assistant.

2.26 The research officer undertakes crime pattern analysis allowing analysts to focus and devote attention to the development of analytical national intelligence

model (NIM) products. Both analysts feel their work is well managed and requests for additional information are appropriately prioritised. They are very appreciative of the support provided by the research officer and it is to the credit of the BCU command team that they have secured this resource and that it is to become a mainstream post from 1 April 2005.

2.27 The local intelligence officers are responsible for co-ordination of RIPA authorities, maintenance of the BCU's operations databases, preparation of intelligence packages and the collation and circulation of statistical crime figures relating to the control strategy priorities on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. On a weekly basis LIOs produce a BCU intelligence circulation - 'The Far Post'.

2.28 Local intelligence assistants rate intelligence received from staff which is either submitted to them using national intelligence forms or directly inputted by officers onto the Force crime intelligence system (CIS). Work is divided mainly on a sector basis, although at times of heavy demand LIAs support colleagues in other sectors. Whilst LIAs feel that the turnaround time to rate the national intelligence forms is acceptable (generally within 24 hours), there was concern expressed about the poor quality and the increase in intelligence submitted through the CIS system and resultant queues. At the time of the Inspection the backlog for rating CIS intelligence in relation to the south east sector was four days, even with the additional support of the LIA based at Berwick.

2.29 Since August 2004, LIAs have experienced an increasing workload and they are clearly struggling to keep up with demand. The recent drive, through the sector review process, to increase intelligence submissions has not been matched by an emphasis on quality and this is undermining the effectiveness and timeliness of intelligence available to operational policing. In August LIAs rated 8,177 items and this had risen to 11,187 by February 2005, which represents an average increase of 1,500 cumulative items per month. The holding of a vacancy of half an LIA post is adding to the pressures placed on these staff and delaying intelligence rating for the BCU.

2.30 **HMIC encourages the BCU Commander to consider the need for quality intelligence submission as well as the volume of intelligence received. This to prioritise information that best supports the BCU control strategy. Once this has been reviewed, in order to drive forward intelligence-led policing, there is a need to ensure that the intelligence unit has the capacity to rate and promulgate intelligence in a timely manner.**

2.31 FIOs operate within the sector policing structure - one FIO attached to each of the eleven sectors and line managed by their relevant sector inspector. Whilst the FIOs in the rural sectors are able to fulfil their intelligence gathering/co-ordinating role effectively, in the south east sectors there is a dilution of the intelligence function in favour of wider support to the sector inspectors. A major, time consuming, task involves the production of statistical information and administrative support for sector bids to the fortnightly TTCG rather than proactively driving and co-ordinating the intelligence focus. As a consequence, bids to TTCG for resource support were demonstrably lacking in intelligence. **HMIC encourages the BCU command team to satisfy itself that the roles, responsibilities and deployment of FIOs are**

appropriate to fully utilise their skills to drive and co-ordinate intelligence-led policing across the BCU.

2.32 The target offender unit and the source management unit closely align to the intelligence unit and they are all accountable to the same detective inspector. This is not considered good practice as the detective inspector is both the nominated controller for covert human intelligence sources (CHISs) and the line manager of the intelligence unit which has potential to raise questions about conflicts of interests. **HMIC encourages the BCU Commander to review the single line management and co-location of source management and intelligence units to satisfy himself of compliance with national and Force guidance.**

2.33 The source management unit has an establishment of a detective sergeant (who also acts as deputy controller) and 5.5 dedicated source handlers. The unit is able to draw on a number of 'source' trained sector staff to assist as necessary. The BCU currently has 31 CHISs but consideration is being given to extending this in a number of sectors to better focus and support the BCU's current control strategy. National intelligence forms are submitted via the internal postal system directly to the controller but at the time of the Inspection there was no administrative support provided which was reducing both the controllers' and handlers' capacity for development work.

Recommendation 5

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team review the intelligence-led policing arrangements, to ensure clear, inclusive and accountable process for all sectors against the control strategy, that operations are properly co-ordinated, that the tasking and co-ordinating process is effective and that the target offender unit has the necessary capacity to properly support this important element of policing.

Briefing Systems

2.34 Local intelligence officers produce a number of briefing documents. On a daily basis supervisory staff are provided with an overview of crime performance for each sector, and on a weekly basis through an intelligence bulletin known as the 'Far Post'. This publication includes issues identified, suspicious vehicles, prison releases and ASBO updates. It is considered valuable and informative by operational staff.

2.35 The inspection team observed a number of uniformed briefings across the BCU. They adequately provided staff with appropriate information regarding the previous day's crimes, performance and clear tasking for that tour of duty. Briefings would, however, be enhanced by integration of CID officers to provide greater focus on intelligence and information sharing.

2.36 An 'extended briefing' format has been developed for those officers returning to duty following the six rest days stipulated in their current duty roster. These

present a more in-depth briefing including an overview of crime during the period they have been absent, and intelligence updates on target and problem profiles. Intelligence unit staff, sector inspectors and CBMs attend these briefings.

2.37 Whilst the briefing structures are good, they will be significantly improved once intelligence-led policing is embedded as described previously.

BCU Performance

2.38 Within this section the term 'MSBCU' (Most Similar Basic Command Unit) will be used to make comparisons of performance. Northumberland BCU is grouped with 14 other most similar BCUs as follows:

Figure 4: Most Similar Basic Command Units	
Force	BCU
Avon and Somerset	Somerset West
Cumbria	Barrow and Kendal
Cumbria	Carlisle and Penrith
Cumbria	Workington and Whitehaven
Derbyshire	Buxton
Durham	South Durham
Gwent	Pontypool
Kent	South East Kent
Kent	Swale
Norfolk	Eastern
Northamptonshire	Eastern
Nottinghamshire	Area B
South Wales	Neath and Port Talbot
Suffolk	Eastern

Crime Data Analysis

2.39 Throughout this report, data which was originally collated for the three separate BCUs during 2003/04, i.e. prior to their amalgamation into the single BCU, is combined to provide consistent comparison with data collected during 2004/05.

2.40 The table below compares Northumberland BCU's performance for the period April 2004 to January 2005 to the same period during 2003/04 – this data has yet to be fully validated and is therefore considered provisional in nature.

Figure 5: Performance				
Performance Indicator	Performance April 2004 to January 2005	% Change	MSBCU group mean	MSBCU group rank
Recorded crime per 1,000 population	60.05	-3.27%	68.05	2
Recorded crime detection rate	29.08%	-3.39 p.p.	29.06%	10
Domestic burglary per 1,000 households	5.69	-28.49%	6.60	5

Figure 5: Performance continued				
Domestic burglary detection rate	20.05%	-0.46 p.p.	18.65%	6
Robberies per 1,000 population	0.16	-22.22%	0.29	2
Robbery crime detection rate	28.57%	3.17 p.p.	24.65%	6
Vehicle crimes per 1,000 population	5.64	5.31%	7.68	4
Vehicle crime detection rate	14.84%	3.07 p.p.	11.75%	4
Violent crimes per 1,000 population	11.23	-6.77%	13.98	2
Violent crime detection rate <i>(includes violence against the person, robbery and sexual offences)</i>	59.57%	-7.49 p.p.	57.53%	8

(Using mid-2003 population estimates from ONS and mid-2003 household estimates from ODPM.)

Crime Reduction

2.41 The BCU has the following targets set for crime and public order reduction during 2004/05:

- Domestic burglary - reduce offences by 2.43%
- Theft from vehicles - reduce offences by 2%
- Theft of vehicles - reduce offences by 2%
- Violent crime - reduce offences by 2%
- Public order - reduce incidents by 10%
- Criminal damage - reduce offences by 6.8%

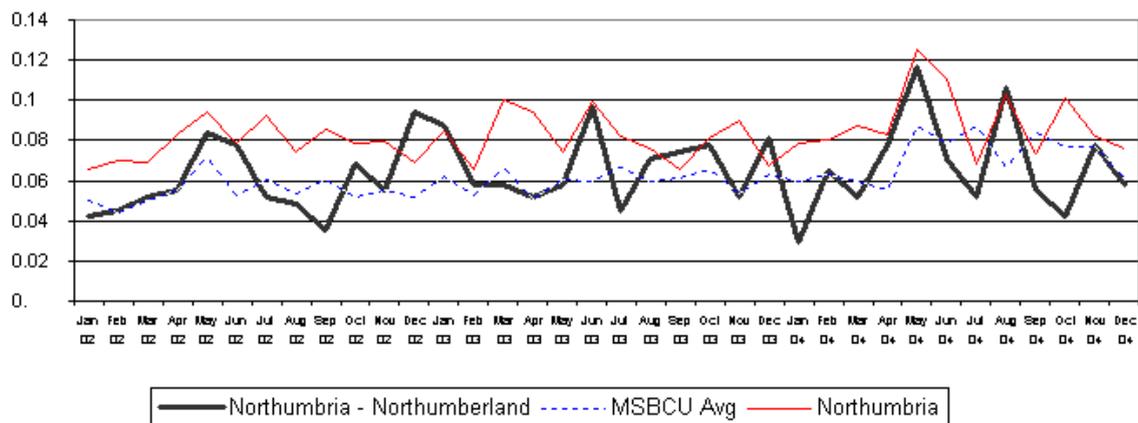
2.42 Northumberland BCU, consistent with the Force, has an enviable track record in crime reduction and this has been the main focus. The BCU continues to experience a reduction – there being a 3.27% decrease in total crime per 1,000 population for the period under consideration. This is eight crimes per 1,000 population below the MSBCU average during 2004/05 and places it second out of the 15 BCUs in this group. Crime trend analysis shows that the BCU consistently remains below the MSBCU average. It has also been at least 20 crimes per 1,000 population below the Force average for the last two years.

2.43 In relation to domestic burglary per 1,000 households, the BCU has seen a huge reduction (almost 28.5%) compared to the corresponding period in 2003/04. At 5.74 crimes per 1,000 households it is just below the MSBCU average of 6.0 crimes and is placed fifth in the group. The BCU is consistently below the MSBCU average throughout the year and remains approximately half that of the Force average.

2.44 In relation to vehicle crime per 1,000 population, the BCU has exceeded the reduction target (5.31% reduction compared to the 2% target set), is almost 25% lower than the MSBCU average, and is placed fourth of the 15 in the group.

2.45 Northumberland BCU is ranked second in its MSBCU group for both robbery and violent crime categories, reaching its reduction targets in both areas and achieving over 22% reduction for robbery.

2.46 There has been a 19.29% increase in sexual offences reported in Northumberland comparing the period April 2004 to January 2005 with the corresponding period the previous year. Whilst accepting that there are large fluctuations in reported offences, the chart below indicates the upward trend in this type of crime. Compared to other crime categories the Northumberland BCU figures for sexual offences are much closer to (and often above) the MSBCU average and just below the Force average.



Comparison Chart - Crimes per 1000 Residents Northumbria - Northumberland Sexual Offences 'Most Similar' BCUs 01 Jan 2002 - 31 Dec 2004

2.47 It is difficult to determine whether such a rise in this category of crime has resulted from more offences being committed or whether it is due to a greater willingness of victims to report them, possibly reflecting a greater confidence in the police and other relevant agencies.

2.48 Northumberland BCU has a newly devolved public protection unit led by a detective inspector and consists of two detective sergeants, eight detective constables (one post being vacant at the time of Inspection), two police constables and one full-time and one part-time support clerk. Their primary responsibilities relate to domestic violence, child protection, sexual offences and high risk 'missing from home' cases. They undertake all liaison work with appropriate agencies, including MAPPA meetings.

2.49 Sector based FIAs support this team in conducting risk assessments and the inputting of information onto the domestic violence database. This arrangement ensures that the PPU has links to all sectors and is particularly valuable in the remote areas of the BCU.

2.50 The inspection team was very impressed with the professional proactive work being undertaken, particularly the early intervention measures for domestic violence and child protection and the agreements with relevant agencies to deal with special cases of concern. MAPPA cases fall into one of three categories, i.e. registered sex offenders, those committing sex or violent offences identified through the probation service as being appropriate for such consideration, and those committing specified

crimes that represent a significant risk of causing serious harm. In the event that a relevant agency identifies a case not falling into one of the specified categories but which is of such concern that it justifies a case conference, one is held. All agencies commit to agreed actions coming from that case conference as if they were MAPPA cases. In the Northumberland BCU detective inspectors have the authority to call such a conference which they do following an appropriate assessment of the case in question.

2.51 The PPU also monitors vulnerable missing from home enquires being managed on the Force command and control system, generates actions where appropriate, and brings any concerns they have with the manner in which such an investigation is progressing to the attention of relevant supervisors and the BCU SMT.

2.52 **HMIC considers the PPU to be performing a crucial role within the BCU and feels that the multi-agency arrangements to consider those cases that fall outside the MAPPA criteria, but which are of particular concern, to represent good practice.**

2.53 The BCU target of reducing public disorder incidents by 10% is not being met and comparison of the period April to November 2004 with the previous year indicates a slight increase (0.8%). Consideration of trend data illustrates that the BCU is improving gradually as the year progresses. April 2004 saw a 19% increase on the previous year; by August this had reduced to a 2.4%, and by November the current level was achieved. Youth disorder features on the BCU's control strategy to focus activity in this area.

2.54 Criminal damage offences for the year to January 2005 have remained almost the same as the previous year (19.60 offences per 1,000 population compared to 19.26 offences for the previous year). This is clearly above the target reduction required and again features on the BCU control strategy.

2.55 The SMT is to be congratulated on its performance in relation to crime reduction. The BCU's positioning in the first or second quartiles in the MSBCU group for all key crime reduction areas is commendable. Vigilance in relation to sexual offences is essential and this is recognised by the BCU command team.

Crime Investigation

2.56 The BCU has the following targets set for crime investigation during 2004/05:

- Burglary dwellings - to detect 21.1%
- Theft from vehicles - to detect 9.1%
- Theft of vehicles - to detect 21.8%
- Violent crime - to detect 67.1%

2.57 For the period April 2004 to January 2005 the BCU has an overall detection rate of 29.08%, slightly above the MSBCU average and placing it tenth highest in the MSBCU group. However, for the last six months of 2004 the overall detection rate was slightly below 25%.

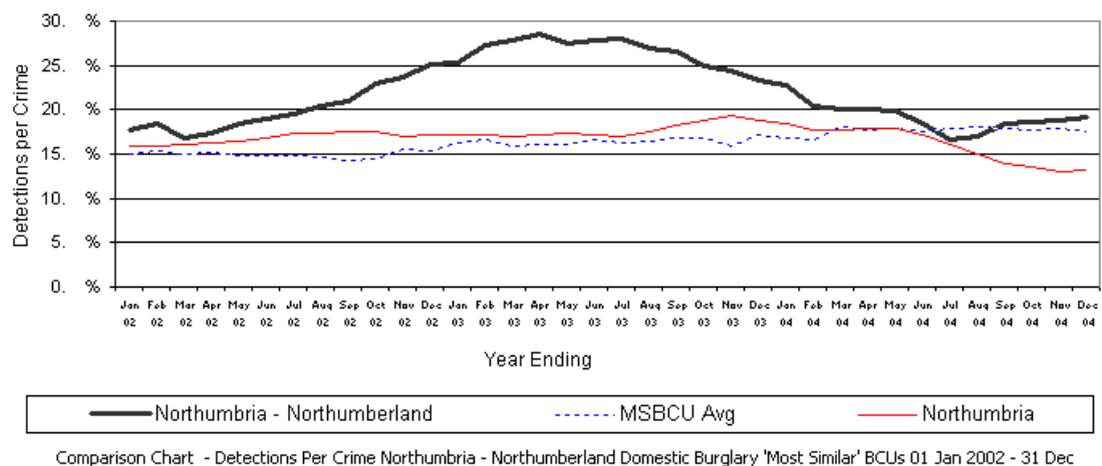
2.58 Some 48% of Northumberland BCU's detections for crime are through either charge or summons, exactly the same proportion as the MSBCU family and a further 29% through cautions compared to 19% for the MSBCU – possibly reflecting the 'Making it Count' initiative. Some 7% of detections in Northumberland are through TICs, compared to 5% for the MSBCUs.

2.59 The BCU has sanction detection and detection rates above the MSBCU group averages. However, for the period April 2004 to January 2005 compared to the same period in the previous year, there have been decreases in all main categories, with the exception of robbery and vehicle crime. This is illustrated in the table below:

Figure 6: Detection Rates

Group Description	Apr to Jan 2003/04	Apr to Jan 2004/05	Change
Robbery	25.40%	28.57%	3.17%
Vehicle crime	11.77%	14.84%	3.07%
Theft and handling	21.13%	20.95%	-0.18%
Burglary (includes domestic and other)	14.43%	13.15%	-1.28%
Criminal damage	15.66%	14.34%	-1.32%
Fraud and forgery	62.05%	56.59%	-5.46%
Violence against the person	68.80%	61.46%	-7.34%
Sexual offences	49.75%	40.43%	-9.32%
Other offences	93.00%	80.31%	-12.69%

2.60 The detection rate for domestic burglary is 20.05% for the year-to-date (April to January), almost 0.5 percentage points lower than for the same period last year and just over 1% below the BCU target. Trend analysis, see below, illustrates the high rate of detection during 2002/03 compared to both the MSBCU and Force average. This was followed by a decline, reaching a low point in July 2004. Since then, steady progress has been made lifting the BCU above the MSBCU average and considerably higher than the Force average.



2.61 In line with both the MSBCU and the Force, the detection rate for violent crime is reducing steadily over time. Currently, Northumberland is missing its target of 67.1% detections by approximately 7.5 percentage points (almost the same as the

reduction in performance experienced since last year). The BCU is eighth in the MSBCU table of 15 in this category.

2.62 The detection rate for vehicle crime has increased by just over 3 percentage points to 14.84%, this places the BCU in fourth place in the MSBCUs and just over 3% above the MSBCU average.

2.63 Force data (April 2004 to January 2005) indicates that the BCU is achieving approximately an 18.39% detection rate for 'theft of motor vehicles' (3.01 percentage point reduction on the previous year) and a 13.33% detection rate for 'theft from motor vehicles' (an improvement of 5.89 percentage points).

2.64 Although not quite reaching most of the crime investigation/detection targets set, the BCU is displaying gradually improving trends in most key crime areas and is likely to be close to most of these targets by the end of the planning year. There is concern that for 'all crime' detection rates have been below 25% for several months, but the area of greatest concern is that of violent crime, and in particular sexual offences (with a detection rate 9.3% lower than last year despite significant increases in reported crime). **HMIC urges the BCU command team to undertake research to determine why there is such an increase in sexual offences reported and a reduction in their detection rates.**

2.65 The BCU has identified detection rates as an area for improvement. The DCI has a weekly meeting with CPS to ensure that decisions regarding statutory charging are assessed and improvements to police and CPS processes are identified and progressed. In addition, several developments have been initiated including the formulation of a detection plan and implementation of a forensic 'hits' team. These are outlined below.

Detection Plan

2.66 This plan outlines the BCU intentions for 2005/06 including an integral and supportive forensic strategy.

2.67 The plan outlines appropriate ownership, actions necessary, review dates and evaluation parameters in respect of key objectives under the following five categories:

- Training needs;
- intelligence opportunities;
- investigation;
- offender management; and
- process management.

2.68 One of the detective chief inspectors has responsibility for monitoring the delivery of the plan and a three monthly system of evaluation has been developed. **Although in its infancy, HMIC acknowledges the positive work being undertaken and encourages the BCU to fully integrate the objectives identified in the detection plan into both the new BCU business plan and the established performance management regime.**

Forensic Investigation Team

2.69 To improve investigation of positive DNA and fingerprint returns the SMT has introduced a forensic investigation team (FIT), shadowing the Force pilot at Newcastle BCU. The Northumberland team has been developed using existing BCU resources and as a consequence has more limited capacity than the Newcastle pilot. It consists of a detective sergeant and three detective constables with further analytical and administrative support being provided by the intelligence unit.

2.70 In September, immediately before the FIT team was formed, there were 142 outstanding DNA and fingerprint identifications. These consist of samples examined that had returned to the BCU with a positive result but not yet finalised. To finalise, work is required to determine whether the positive return relates to a suspect or to someone legitimately at the scene of the crime, i.e. they can be eliminated from the investigation. The FIT team manages all positive DNA and fingerprint returns by either finalising them or, if appropriate, co-ordinating and allocating them to the BCU burglary team. The average number of outstanding forensic returns since January 2005 has been reduced to approximately 24, the majority being finalised within weeks of receipt.

2.71 Consideration of performance also illustrates the success of the team in converting positive returns into offences detected, as illustrated in the table below:

Figure 7: Forensic Science			
	September 2004	October 2004	November 2004
Positive returns (combined DNA & fingerprints)	91	29	21
Positive returns relating to suspects (i.e. not elimination)	68	21	15
Detections	62	57	27
Detections as a percentage of positive returns relating to suspects	91%	271%	180%

2.72 The BCU is rightly waiting until full evaluation of the Force pilot is complete before considering the development of the FIT. That said, the inspection team was concerned that this valuable resource was not operational during December 2004 due to operational abstraction of staff. Subject to the findings of the Force review, there is a requirement to improve resilience of the FIT, possibly by amalgamation into the intelligence unit.

Summary

2.73 Northumberland is a well managed and an effectively led BCU. The commitment of the SMT and focus on performance during a period of immense change is commendable. The sector/community policing model, sector review processes, community based partnership initiatives and the quality of leadership by inspectors and sergeants are particular strengths. As a consequence, crime reduction performance remains excellent and crime investigation/detection is improving in key areas, taking the BCU into the top half of the MSBCU group in most categories.

2.74 Northumberland has a complex arrangement of local strategic partnerships and crime and disorder reduction partnerships and this requires considerable commitment from the BCU Commander and the rest of the management team. There are clearly issues emerging as the new 'Stronger and Safer Communities' arrangements come to fruition, but the BCU Commander is aware of how to take this forward in the interests of continuing community safety improvements.

2.75 Work being undertaken in preparation of the 2005/06 BCU business plan is encouraging, particularly in respect of essential resource plans needed for financial management and effective development/training identified through the sector skills profiling and PDR system.

2.76 There is an urgent need to improve police staff communications and finalise structures necessary to support corporate/BCU development as this is leading to uncertainty and affecting the morale of a very committed workforce. Several operational issues are also identified within the report that require immediate consideration, not least custody provision in the rural areas, and effective leadership and support for those officers working in remote locations. Intelligence-led policing (especially the quality of intelligence submission, intelligence unit structures, capacity roles and responsibilities) is not working to maximum effect and this is the area that offers the greatest opportunity for improvement.

2.77 Development of the BCU detection plan and consultation arrangements between the detective chief inspector and CPS to improve file process and decision making are positive developments in taking the BCU forward against key performance targets. The BCU command team should identify improved file quality (especially in respect of the 'Making it Count' initiative) and standard of modus operandi for crime reporting as essential areas for development in ensuring that the strategy produces the best results possible.

2.78 Overall, the BCU Commander is to be complimented for what has been achieved to date. He and his team are clearly taking the lead in many difficult areas, are well respected and have considerable operational credibility to take this BCU forward.

Recommendations

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary makes five recommendations:

1. That the BCU command team review the management arrangements in respect of rural officers particularly at times of demanding or critical incident handling.

[Para 1.39 refers]

2. That the BCU command team review all aspects of custody in the rural areas, to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

[Para 1.45 refers]

3. That the BCU command team review the BCU communication strategy to ensure that all staff, in particular police staff members, are informed of impending changes, including anticipated benefits as a consequence of these developments.

[Para 1.57 refers]

4. That the BCU command team review its application of absence management policies and procedures to ensure that police staff absence is subject to the same degree of supervisory attention, welfare support and information analysis as that of police officer sickness. In addition, the SMT should undertake a full review of sickness to establish whether there are underlying causes to such a large increase in police staff sickness and identify appropriate remedial action.

[Para 1.79 refers]

5. That the BCU command team review the intelligence-led policing arrangements, to ensure clear, inclusive and accountable process for all sectors against the control strategy, that operations are properly co-ordinated, that the tasking and co-ordinating process is effective and that the target offender unit has the necessary capacity to properly support this important element of policing.

[Para 2.33 refers]