

Partnership Works... A Case Study

Operation Crackdown

A pioneering partnership is delivering fantastic results across East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. Operation Crackdown is a Police-led initiative which focuses on reducing abandoned vehicles and anti-social driving. The operation began in 2004, launching a reporting system for abandoned vehicles both by phone and online. It is supported by all the local councils in Sussex as well as East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).



The Challenge

A Sussex Police project in 2000/2001 investigating the need for a new contact centre revealed that a large number of calls were received about abandoned vehicles across Sussex. Enquiries by the Police confirmed suspicions that abandoned vehicles were a problem for many local organisations, and that each organisation dealt with abandoned vehicles through their own system, resulting in multiple reporting and delays in removal.

The issue of abandoned vehicles was quickly recognised as an area that needed more investigation because of the workload it was creating for a number of local organisations, with up to 20 calls resulting from one abandoned car. Sussex Police commissioned a study through Manchester Business School, funded by specific money through the Government's Invest to Save scheme, into the environmental and financial impacts of abandoned vehicles.

The study estimated that 32,000 abandoned vehicles were recorded in Sussex every year. Of those, 1402 were malicious car fires, and the total cost per vehicle, from the person taking the call to the vehicle being removed was £307 per vehicle. There was an annual cost to the taxpayer of £10 million with an average of 17 days to remove vehicles. It was also revealed that 42% of abandoned vehicles were stolen and/or re-abandoned.

The Action

There was an obvious need to coordinate the work of removing abandoned vehicles across Sussex, and to make sure that the process was as efficient as possible both for the organisations involved, and the public reporting vehicles. The idea was to implement a single process as accepted practice across Sussex in the form of an information hub, a centralised database that all interested organisations and the public could have access to and could work with. All 16 councils in the area, the East and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services, and Sussex Police came together to decide how a trial should be developed.

The trial began using basic online reporting, paper systems and joint inspections of vehicles with two district councils, Chichester and Arun, in West Sussex and immediately saw a reduction in the time taken to remove an abandoned vehicle. As the reporting system developed, other local organisations joined in until all 16 councils, East and West Sussex Fire and Rescue Services and Sussex Police were using the same system. The essence of Operation Crackdown is a single online database of all vehicles reported as abandoned, including all relevant details and photographs.

The database can be accessed by all of the organisations involved, which allows them to track all reported activity on each vehicle and eliminates the possibility of duplicate records. It automatically generates an inbox of jobs for each council, dependent on the location of the vehicle reported, and each job

is colour-coded in relation to how far down the process each job is before the in relation to how far down the process each job is before the vehicle can be legally removed e.g. a job is before the vehicle can be legally removed e.g. waiting for a response from the owner after the first written enquiry about their vehicle.



This process also allows organisations to work closely on particular cases, such as using the resources of Sussex Police e.g. to request credit checks or crime information when this information is necessary. The trials were so successful that by 2004, Operation Crackdown was standard practice for the way to deal with abandoned vehicles across Sussex. Since then, the project has been expanded in 2008 to include reporting on anti-social driving for Sussex Police. The system also has a website to raise awareness of the work being done, and to encourage the public report abandoned vehicles or anti-social driving wherever it occurs across Sussex.

The Operation Crackdown project has been managed by two groups. The Practitioner Group includes administration staff, inspectors and other individuals whose day-to-day job involves dealing with abandoned vehicles. This group developed the foundations of the project, such as the details of how the reporting system should work, and remain in almost daily contact with Sussex Police in their work with abandoned vehicles.

They also meet formally four times a year to share practice. The Management Group meet twice a year to work on the more strategic issues around

abandoned vehicles, such as dealing with new legislation, and new system developments for the database.

Since its initial set-up costs, Operation Crackdown is managed by one full-time employed IT officer at Sussex Police who maintains the online reporting system. The rest of the costs associated with abandoned vehicles are absorbed by the organisations who are continuing with their original roles such as District/Borough Councils in removing vehicles and County Councils in disposing of them.

The Impact

In many respects, the impact of this type of work is difficult to measure. For those members of the public who have been involved in the abandoned vehicle process, Sussex has moved away from multiple reporting and lengthy delays. For every vehicle that's reported, information is stored on the system so that it is possible to evidence why action may or may not have been taken in the event of an enquiry.

Every organisation has a different role to play in dealing with abandoned vehicles e.g. District and Borough Councils remove vehicles, while the County Councils organise their disposal. Working together on a centralised system, supported by regular meetings, has developed strong working relationships between key individuals and the local organisations as a whole.

Local organisations have managed to maintain consistently high standards in removing abandoned vehicles through Operation Crackdown. Currently, the system receives an average of 600 reports of abandoned vehicles every month across Sussex. However, for the months of October, November and December 2008 in East Sussex 81% of vehicles were removed within 24 hours of being legally able to do so. These figures show that with organisations and the public working together, Operation Crackdown is having a direct impact on the lives of residents and visitors every day, making East Sussex a cleaner, safer place.

One of the most significant impacts has been the 50-60% reduction in vehicle fires reported by the Fire and Rescue Services which relates directly back to the work of Operation Crackdown in securing safer environments for the communities of Sussex.

Lessons Learnt:

- The key to success is getting a number of local organisations on board with a strong commitment to making the project work. This was particularly true when overcoming the perceived differences between local organisations
- Encouraging public reporting of abandoned vehicles may increase the amount of false reporting, however this is compensated by the

centralised database which can evidence why action was perhaps not taken

- Strong IT infrastructure and support has been necessary to launch and maintain this work, however, despite the initial outlay, the secure system is internet based with no major investment needed by any of the organisations
- The public are central to the success of the project in reporting incidents whenever they occur
- Celebrate success and share good practice

Organisations Involved:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sussex Police • East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service • West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service • DVLA • East Sussex County Council • Adur District Council • Lewes District Council • Eastbourne Borough Council • Hastings Borough Council | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arun District Council • Chichester District Council • Crawley Borough Council • Horsham District Council • Mid Sussex District Council • Worthing Borough Council • West Sussex County Council • Brighton & Hove City Council • Wealden District Council • Rother District Council |
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Contact:

Sergeant Bryan Huberman
 Operation Crackdown Project Officer
 Sussex Police
 01273 404 515

bryan.huberman@sussex.pnn.police.uk

Operation Crackdown: www.operationcrackdown.org

Further Information:

Pride of Place is East Sussex's Sustainable Community Strategy for 2026. It sets out the long-term ambitions for the county which local organisations, from councils to community groups, are working towards for 2026.

Removing abandoned vehicles within 24 hours of being legally able to do so was a target from The East Sussex Local Area Agreement 1 (2006 – 2009).

For more information on what issues are being prioritised in East Sussex, please visit the East Sussex Strategic Partnership at www.essp.org.uk

East Sussex Strategic Partnership

County Hall, St. Anne's Crescent
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1UE

www.essp.org.uk

01273 481 177

essp@eastsussex.gov.uk