Northumbria tries creative initiatives

by Sir Stanley Bailey

Northumbria Police is a Department of some 3,500 sworn officers situated in the North East corner of England adjoining the Scottish border and it covers an area of some 2,200 square miles. In addition, the Force employees some 1,000 civilians. Northumbria Police is unique in the United Kingdom insomuch as it is made up of a rural shire county together with a heavily populated urban area. The variety provides a good testing ground for crime prevention initiatives and because of this is recognized as being one of the Forces in the forefront of crime prevention in the country.

Northumbria Police force consists of six territorial divisions: Traffic, CID, Training and Personnel, Complaints and Discipline, Support Services, Administration, Inspection and Development, and, finally, Community Crime Prevention Department. This Department has been in existence for some 10 years, originally under the name of Community Services, but with the growing realization of the importance of community crime prevention, it changed its name in January 1988.

The Force was selected by the Home Office (central government) to participate in a five-city initiative to look at the multi-agency approach in crime prevention. This initiative commenced January 1986 and concluded in July 1987 and covered an area in urban North Tyneside consisting of public and private housing. Because of the success of this initiative, it was decided that the entire procedure would be adopted throughout the entire Force area. This is currently being done and it is hopeful that it will, in the future, impact on crime within the Northumbria Police area. Each territorial division has its own community crime prevention team that ensures that the Force policy is adhered to, but it is adapted to meet the needs of that particular division.

In the rural division, the crime prevention officer liaised very closely with the local crime prevention panel and they have developed a crime prevention bus. This is a bus that was provided by the local transport company and is similar to a London omnibus, with facilities now for meetings or video viewings upstairs and security displays downstairs. This unit can visit isolated villages and provide meeting places for Neighborhood Watch, Farm Watch, Business Watch, etc. The cost to the police department for this bus was minimal due to the fact that the majority of companies involved provided facilities and labor free of charge.
In Sunderland, one of the urban divisions, the crime prevention officer became aware of an experiment in Sweden with cardboard cut-out police officers to cut down shoplifting. He arranged with a local artist to have two larger-than-life cardboard cut-out police officers placed in two different types of shops within his area. In a six-month experimental period, both stores reported a large reduction in the "shrinkage," a modern-day euphemism for shoplifting and theft by employees.

Towards the end of 1987, the Force Crime Prevention Officer in Liaison with the local building societies, which are companies that provide funds for people to purchase private homes, developed an initiative whereby people were able to apply to the building society to have security items added to their mortgages. So, for something like $2 per week, they could have alarms, bolts, locks, etc., of the approved type, fitted to their homes. This initiative has been so successful that it is expected that it will be introduced nationally within the next few months. On 1 January 1988, every sworn officer in the Force was issued a crime prevention manual which not only deals with the locks, bars, and bolts of crime prevention, but also the philosophy. Thus it could be argued that Northumbria Police have 3,500 crime prevention officers.

If anyone has any queries regarding any of the initiatives, if they could direct their requests to Superintendent W. Laidler, Staff Officer, Command Block, Northumbria Police, Force Headquarters, Ponteland, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE20 OBL, he will ensure that the correct person deals with the matter.

*EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is a verbatim rendering of Sir Stanley's prose, so it maintains British spelling and usage.*