

Thinking – step one

How to develop a tailored project plan for hot spots policing and consider barriers to success.

First published 19 October 2022

6 mins read

Summary

- Consider local force context when approaching hot spots policing. There is no single blueprint for hot spots policing that can be successful everywhere.
- Assess and decide which elements of hot spots policing are most appropriate. It's helpful to adopt an outside view and draw on other hot spots policing programmes.
- Identify the key stakeholders for the chosen programme of work. Consider how they may influence the programme.
- Develop a communications plan. This should include an overview of what's going to happen, individuals' roles and what's expected of them, and why the approach is important for crime reduction.
- Assess potential obstacles once the programme plan is in place.

This section considers three areas that are often neglected in hot spots policing. These are:

- deciding the type of hot spot policing approach
- communication methods
- consideration for the users and stakeholders

It also covers how to support planning success, using an outside view and pre-mortem assessments.

- [Read more about hot spots policing](#)
- [See an overview of common challenges and potential solutions that may need consideration during this stage](#)

Deciding the approach

Local context affects hot spots policing. There is no single blueprint for hot spots policing that can be successful everywhere. The programme should be specific to the police force and local target area.

During planning you may need to consider:

- what resources are available and how to overcome any staffing issues
- how many hot spots can be covered by the available resources
- what to ask officers to do at the hot spot – for example, provide additional patrol presence or engage in problem-solving activities
- time and cost of any required training
- changes to computer systems and other technical considerations
- resistance from officers
- lack of strict adherence to the target areas

It may not be possible to consider all these areas before starting a hot spots policing programme. But it's important to address as many potential issues as possible at this stage.

Example

One force identified 40 hot spots to receive patrols of 10 to 15 minutes. This was later reduced to 20 hot spots due to limited resources. This shows the importance of having resources in place before starting a hot spots policing programme.

Users and stakeholders

The planning process must involve everyone implementing the hot spots policing programme. Trials in different environments suggest this is important for a programme's success.

Identifying individuals and groups connected to the programme is therefore an important step. Consider their involvement and their influence on hot spots policing.

How to identify stakeholders

When identifying stakeholders, consider:

- who the hot spots policing programme affects

- who can influence the outcomes
- the potential champions and resistors of the programme
- who is responsible for managing the outcome
- who can facilitate or impede the outcome through participation, non-participation or opposition
- who can contribute resources

It may be appropriate to contact a broader range of people about the hot spots policing programme. For example, if it's being implemented in an area that is not accustomed to hot spots policing.

Talking to community leaders can also help understand the legitimacy of the approach.

Methods of communication

Creating a communication strategy is important to:

- avoid inaccurate information and assumptions
- identify who needs to know what, when they need to know and which channels to use

Many communication methods have been tried when starting hot spots policing programmes. These include email, video briefings and face-to-face approaches with officers.

Hot spots policing champions

It can be useful to have a champion for the hot spots policing programme. Champions are most valuable if they have some expertise and are peers who can relate to the challenges faced by policing.

Face-to-face briefings

Face-to-face briefings are more successful when they include emerging performance data. This personalises the process and underlines the responsibilities of all involved.

Outside view

Taking an outside view can help when planning a hot spots policing programme. This means:

- considering similar hot spots programmes that have already been undertaken

- using these examples to identify issues during the set up or running of the programme

How it helps

An outside view can provide expectations about:

- preparation timescales
- initial or select outcomes to be achieved
- analytical support
- briefings
- resourcing
- technology
- training
- understanding of and compliance with policy

Getting an outside view

To gain an outside view of hot spots policing, you can:

- speak to colleagues in other forces
- access published studies
- view government and official documentation
- speak to experts in the field

It proved impossible for the analyst to provide timely performance reports on a frequent basis using the data from an Excel spreadsheet. Police, who have carried out a similar project, have a system in place that extracts the data, and they were contacted to provide assistance and advice with this issue.

Police officer from a force implementing hot spots policing

Pre-mortem – thinking about what could go wrong

It's important to identify what could go wrong during hot spot policing using a pre-mortem.

A pre-mortem is an approach that seeks to imagine that an innovation or project has failed. It then works backwards to determine what could lead to its failure.

Pre-mortems usually take place after the team brief about the plan.

Examples

One force found that 'no fit assessment had taken place to test the organisational readiness, and the technology had not been tried or tested'.

A study looked at the successful implementation of hot spots. This included a pre-mortem conducted in the gaps between COVID-19 lockdowns. The study found 'potential barriers to implementation such as staffing and funding'.

Staffing was a recurring problem in several forces. Another case reported:

A number of times the project team were advised that resourcing would be difficult, as there were limited or no resources on the late shift, or the resources available were abstracted for pre-planned operations such as Halloween, bonfire night and support to roads policing operations.

This affected the level of patrol, achieving only 57% compliance with the hot spot patrol plan. The target was 90% (Bland and others, 2021).

Common challenges and potential solutions

Challenge	Potential solution
Difficulties identifying suitable hot spots.	Use of analytical support to identify areas with the highest levels of crime. Software is available which allows geo-fencing of hot spot areas.
Hot spots are defined without consideration of the volume of crime – all areas are treated equally.	Data should be used to define areas with highest levels of crime. Resources should be allocated based on this.

Challenge	Potential solution
Hot spots are too large to be effectively patrolled.	Hot spots should be micro-units of geography. An officer standing in one place should be able to see most of the hot spot with their naked eye – although the hot spot size must be balanced with the amount of crime experienced within it.
Officers are not spending enough time in the hot spot.	Use of appropriate tracking technology together with focused feedback to officers. It's also useful to have a stable management structure for these activities. This allows forces to learn from experience.
Officers are unsure of what they should be doing in hot spots.	Officers should be briefed before becoming involved hot spot activities. Typically for high visibility patrols, officers should be visible to the public and carry out engagement activities.
There are insufficient resources available to conduct a hot spot policing strategy.	Reducing the number of hotspots to patrol. Or considering ring-fencing dedicated resources for this activity.
It's not possible to track officers in and out of hot spots.	Use of an appropriate IT solution. This can be mobile apps, handheld global positioning system (GPS), or radio tracking.
Officers are resistant to the concept of hot spots policing.	Officers should receive training on the concept of hot spots policing, including evidence of the benefits of this approach. Officers should also be given real-time feedback about the progress of the hot spots policing project and the opportunity to discuss any issues.

Challenge	Potential solution
An inconsistent approach is taken to hot spots policing across the force.	Creation of a project team to direct activities in a consistent fashion. Appropriate training to relevant staff – especially at sergeant level. If possible, consider appointing officers to hot spots policing activity on a long-term basis.

Tags

Hot spots policing Crime reduction