Tasking – step five

Ensuring availability of resources for hot spots policing and deciding on activities.

First published 19 October 2022

4 mins read

Summary

- Overtime can be a pragmatic approach to tasking but can result in fewer patrols than desired.
- A dedicated resource model can be efficient. It can support training, decrease operating time costs, provide long-term stability and support the consistent delivery of hot spots policing.
- Permanent supervisors can support the long-term success of hot spots policing, regardless of the tasking model.
- Problem-oriented approaches offer promising results for crime reduction. Particular benefits are seen when tailoring responses for specific recurring problems.
- Traditional police patrols still deter crime when they are random, intermittent and last for 14 to 16 minutes.

Tasking approaches

Deciding which resources to use to police the hot spots is one of the key issues in hot spots policing.

Forces used two different approaches. These were:

- **officers on overtime**
- **creating full-time dedicated posts for hot spots policing**

Overtime model

When using an overtime model, forces reported major staffing issues during peak demand hours.

This problem became worse during high-crime periods. For example, seasonal holidays, planned and unplanned major events, and weekend late-night hours (until 4am) in high violence night-time economy areas.

High-harm crimes often take place during anti-social hours. This makes the overtime model challenging in a hot spots policing context.

Use of the overtime model was assessed in neighbourhood teams. This showed that officers could not deliver hot spots policing in the night-time economy. This was due to a culture of interrupting proactive work to answer 999 or 101 calls.

Experience from forces demonstrates that overtime models:

- could cost 50% more than expenditure for an established hot spots policing unit
- generate 33% fewer hot spots policing patrols than business-as-usual patrols

Dedicated resource model

Learning from forces suggests that dedicated hot spots policing resources could benefit every force. This model can provide more efficient:

- training
- management of the most challenging hours to work

Another solution would be to embed hot spots policing in units that do not respond to 999 calls. For example, a force tactical support unit or other proactive policing unit.

Supervision

Evidence from forces shows that tasking hot spots policing is best supported by permanent supervisors. The supervisors should be individuals who engage in hot spots policing work.

Having dedicated supervisors ensures:

- knowledge of hot spots policing practices
- commitment to the delivery of hot spots policing
- consistency for frontline officers who can work with one supervisor over repeated shifts

The aim is to foster an ongoing relationship. This should facilitate feedback and corrections in hot spots policing work. This can be applied to both overtime and dedicated resource-based models.

Activity in hot spots

Evidence from forces shows that hot spots policing reduces overall crime and serious violence. However, there is still ambiguity on how best to conduct hot spots policing.

There are two strategies employed in hot spots policing. These are:

- problem-oriented policing strategies (problem-solving)
- traditional patrol-based functions (also known as targeted or saturated patrol)

- **See more about hot spots policing strategies**

Problem-oriented approaches

Problem-solving interventions are better at reducing crime than activities involving increased policing (Braga and others, 2019).

This means that forces who tailor responses to specific recurring problems are more likely to see a reduction in crime. All problem-solving activity should be carried out using a structured problem-solving methodology – for example, **SARA (scanning, analysis, response, assessment)**.

- **See related problem-solving resources**

Traditional enforcement approaches

Traditional enforcement activities still produce an effective result in crime hot spots.

In more traditional policing strategies, the best available evidence suggests that the most effective strategies for deterring offenders are the following.

- Intermittent patrol of hot spots for 14 to 16 minutes. While this evidence is largely from the US (Koper, 1995), several UK studies have found statistically significant reductions in crime through the use of patrols of this duration (Ariel and others, 2016; Basford and others, 2021; Bland and others, 2021).
- Randomising patrols to ensure they do not become predictable and avoidable (Sherman, 1990).

High-visibility patrolling can help to reduce crime while developing a longer-term problem-solving approach.

Related resources

Other resources to support a problem-solving approach for reducing serious violence.

- **Homicide problem-solving guide**
- **Knife crime problem-solving guide**
- **Neighbourhood policing guidelines**
- **Successful police problem-solving – practice guide**
- **Implementing and sustaining problem-oriented policing: a guide (University College London)**
- **Problem solving for neighbourhood policing (University College London)**
- **Understanding and responding to Crime and disorder hot spots (Arizona State University)**
- **Better policing toolkit – Problem-oriented policing (RAND)**

Tags

Hot spots policing   Crime reduction