

Clear, hold, build – West Yorkshire Police and Merseyside Police

Framework for bringing serious and organised crime group threats into neighbourhood policing.

First published

25 April 2023

Key details

Does it work?	Smarter practice
Topic	Neighbourhood crime
Organisation	West Yorkshire Police Merseyside Police
Target group	Communities

Smarter practice

Overview

Clear, hold, build (CHB) is a framework for bringing the tackling of serious and organised crime threats into neighbourhood policing. It also involves partners and the community in delivering and sustaining reductions in serious organised crime and related crime.

The core aim of CHB is to:

- reclaim and rebuild communities persistently affected by organised criminal groups
- restore the relationship between residents, the police and statutory agencies

The police cannot tackle serious and organised crime alone. It requires the local community, community organisations and statutory partners to work together. CHB helps to do this in a cohesive way.

CHB is an operational framework designed to improve the local response to tackling one or a combination of serious and organised crime threats, including:

- criminal networks (predominantly organised crime groups)
- priority individuals
- vulnerabilities
- geographic hot spots of highest harm

CHB uses a place-based approach to understand the totality of serious and organised crime threats. It provides a model that forces can use to work in a more structured and coordinated way with partners. It ensures the community is involved in the response and has a say in the interventions that impact local areas. It ensures that the local response to serious and organised crime is sustainable and moves beyond conventional enforcement tactics.

Background

This smarter practice example is based on the experiences of two forces implementing CHB – West Yorkshire Police and Merseyside Police.

West Yorkshire Police took part in a pilot to develop and test CHB as a proof of concept between 2020 and 2021, implementing CHB in the BD3 postcode area covering Bradford Moor (known as BD3 Unite).

[Read more about the West Yorkshire Police pilot in the practice bank](#)

Phase two of the pilot ran throughout 2021 and 2022. This phase involved seven forces – including Bedfordshire, Hampshire, Merseyside, North Wales, Northumbria, South Yorkshire, Suffolk – while continuing to monitor CHB's impact in Bradford.

Merseyside has implemented CHB in several areas. This evaluation includes learning from implementation in the Beachwood estate and an area that crosses boundaries covering Longview in Knowsley and the Yewtree area of Liverpool.

Problem

When CHB was first implemented, there were high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour in both areas – including violence, drugs and county lines activity. There was also high unemployment and

social deprivation, low levels of community trust in policing and a number of separate organised crime groups operating within the areas. In Merseyside there were reports of firearms discharges. In Bradford Moor the area had become a hostile policing environment, with police cars being bricked. High profile homicides were also a factor in the choice to implement CHB in both areas.

The police service working with partners and the community to tackle local problems is central to the CHB model. Existing evidence shows that arresting people committing serious organised crime is not enough on its own to make any transformative and sustainable change to the overall levels of crime and resulting harm upon local communities.

For a summary of the evidence, see the [Police Foundation report, 'The impact of organised crime in local communities' \(2017\)](#), pages 30-34.

Response

The CHB framework uses a three-phase operating model.

1. Clear – interventions (arrests and relentless disruption) that target organised crime group members, their networks, business interests, criminality and spheres of influence. The police use all powers and levers to impede their ability to operate. This creates safer spaces to begin restoring community confidence.
2. Hold – interventions, counter-measures and contingency plans to consolidate and stabilise the initial clear phase. This stops remaining or other organised crime group members from capitalising on the vacuum created. It improves community confidence by ensuring spaces remain safe. Visible neighbourhood policing in hotspot areas provides continuing reassurance that police are still present.
3. Build – a single, whole-system approach to delivering community-empowered interventions that tackle drivers of crime, exploitation of vulnerabilities and geographic places where crime occurs. This improves living, working and recreational environment in the community for residents. It empowers them to work with stakeholders to generate resilience and build a safer community.

It's important to note that these phases of activity need to be deployed flexibly. Although they may initially happen in succession, they should afterwards be repeated as required. They may be implemented at the same time and recur continually but with different intensity through the life of the project.

The model relies on connectivity between the three phases as part of a coherent, place-based response. Each phase is designed to motivate and empower communities, so they have greater confidence and agency.

Logic model

Problem

- Organised crime gangs operating within a community.
- High public tolerance of organised crime.
- High levels of socio-economic deprivation and unemployment.
- Exploitation and the draw of criminal careers.
- Lack of community pride in the local area.
- Lack of confidence in and communication with the police.
- Open drug dealing.
- Serious violence and homicide occurring in the location.
- Firearms discharges.
- Anti-social behaviour, including the criminal use of cars.
- Hostile environment for traditional policing, for example, bricking of police cars.

Response

- Local serious organised crime profile developed to understand the threat, risk and harm in the community.
- Three flexible phases of activity – clear, hold and build.
- Clear – high profile, intelligence-led enforcement focused on key organised crime group members, days of action, arrests and working with partners to make use of all available legislation. This phase can be repeated as frequently as needed, but the intensity required may lessen as the initiative develops and community resilience increases.
- Hold – continued reassurance policing in hot spot areas. Neighbourhood policing teams take ownership of organised crime groups and are focused on continued disruption tactics. There is continued communication with the community to understand their priorities.
- Build – involves community asset mapping, building partnerships and community engagement, continued communication with the community about the actions happening as a result of the initiative, and participatory budget events using communication service providers (CSP) and Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) money. Work is done with partners to improve the local environment – for example, tidy ups, reclaiming buildings and creating new green areas.

Resource

- Neighbourhood policing resources for all three phases via a dedicated full-time lead responsible officer (LRO).
- Senior responsible officer (SRO) for the project as a whole. This should be someone who works in the force serious organised crime unit and can embed CHB as part of the force's overarching response to the serious organised crime threat.
- Analytical capability to provide serious organised crime local profiles, to support the intelligence-led targeting of key organised crime group members and the monitoring of the impact.
- Resources for days of action and high-profile enforcement activity in the clear phase.
- Dedicated neighbourhood policing resources for the hold phase.
- Dedicated communications resources.
- Dedicated resources to lead the community group and maintain relationships and momentum on build activities. This is better led by someone respected locally from outside of the police.

- Numbers of arrests.
- Numbers of disruptions achieved, such as civil orders and warrants executed.
- Number of attendees at community events and meetings.
- Increased reporting to the police.
- Numbers of seizures (for example, of cash, drugs and firearms).
- Use of the POCA.

Outputs

- Increased actionable intelligence received.
- Community assets mapped and mobilised.
- Funding secured.
- Community clear-ups undertaken.
- Days of action undertaken.
- Increased communication with the community.

- Lowered Management of Risk in Law Enforcement (MoRiLE) score or crime severity score.
- Reduced crime and disorder.
- Reduced firearms discharges.

Outcomes

- Improved public confidence in the area.
- Increased communication and reporting to the police.
- Citizens are well-informed about CHB.
- Community is more assertive and confident and less tolerant of organised crime.
- Improved understanding of the threat risk and harm in the locality.

Implementation

Focusing CHB on a small area was found to be most effective in allowing for the concentration of effort. For example, the Beachwood estate in Merseyside is an area of approximately 4,000 homes.

A range of information was considered by Merseyside and West Yorkshire when selecting where to implement CHB. Serious organised crime local profiles were used to understand the relative threat across areas, but their development requires significant analytical resource. If there is not enough resource to develop a profile for all local areas, they are best focused on the most problematic wards in forces.

The availability of local serious organised crime community coordinators was also important, as they were key to the implementation.

In some forces, critical incidents determined the area chosen. However, CHB is intended as a tactic aimed at prevention and not a reactive tool.

The following factors were identified by Merseyside and West Yorkshire as requiring consideration when selecting an area to implement CHB.

- Location of organised crime groups.
- Serious organised crime local profile, including the [MoRILE scores](#) for mapped organised crime groups and for the hot spot area.
- Views of local policing leads.
- Critical incidents.
- Evidence of lack of reporting of crime, victims not supporting prosecution cases and lack of intelligence.
- Community assets and statutory service provision are understood and mapped, including gaps in the services.
- Mapping where the force is already undertaking work to address similar threats – for example, to tackle county lines.
- Crime and disorder data.

The ability to monitor performance where CHB is implemented is important to understand its impact on:

- the level of serious organised crime threat
- community trust and confidence in policing

The ability to gather data specific to the area to monitor outcomes is another consideration. When Merseyside Police chose an area that crossed local boundaries, their IT system allowed them to define an area for the purpose of measuring crime and incidents. This enabled performance monitoring. If this type of technology is not available, it may be easier to match the boundaries of current wards or super output areas.

Preparation

The preparation before launching CHB in an area is important to its success. The following requirements were highlighted.

Senior strategic buy-in

Ensure senior officers within the force, partners and locally elected members are informed about and signed up to the implementation of CHB from the start. This will provide a collective understanding of the model, what it will achieve, and an awareness of the resource commitment required throughout the lifetime of the initiative – not just in the initial clear phase.

Governance structure

Ensure a clear governance structure for CHB from the outset that involves partner agencies. This will help with ongoing access to resources and monitoring impact. Forces should look to repurpose or extend existing governance structures where they exist to avoid duplication. However, it's likely that an operational delivery group will be required in some form. This should report into a strategic-level structure for the purposes of accountability and ensuring wider stakeholder awareness and input.

Performance monitoring

Identifying a range of outcome measures expected to be impacted by CHB and collecting baseline data prior to CHB will help with performance monitoring. It will also provide evidence of any benefit and changes over time through the hold and build phases. Both quantitative and qualitative measures should be used where possible. Professional judgement should be used where robust measures are not available.

Naming the initiative

A name should be chosen for the initiative that:

- resonates with the community
- doesn't sound too police-led

This enables the brand to continue long after the initial police-led involvement has been scaled back. In some locations the name was chosen through a competition run by local schools. This approach was felt to help the community to feel more involved and empowered. This is particularly important during the build phase, where ownership of the response should be transitioned to the community and voluntary or private sector.

Dedicated communications strategy

Having a communications strategy for the CHB initiative can ensure:

- operational outcomes are communicated to the community effectively
- community reassurance is provided
- actionable intelligence is collected

Community asset mapping

This involves identifying the key organisations working within the area, the services they provide and to which demographic groups, and the capacity they have to deliver. This ensures those already working on the ground can be brought into the build phase. It also identifies gaps in service provision that may need to be filled. This needs to be a live, ongoing process.

Lead for community building

Identify an appropriate non-police chair or co-chairs to lead the community building work. This role is key to the success of the sustained impact. It must be held by a respected person or people, able to:

- navigate local politics
- be seen as fair and outside of local rivalries
- establish an inclusive environment where all voices can be heard

Tactics for each phase

CHB is implemented differently depending on the nature of the community, the level of threat, harm and risk within the community and the intent and capability of the mapped organised crime groups. The following tables provide examples of the tactics used in each phase in the two areas visited.

Clear phase

The clear phase is led by the police and signals to the community that police enforcement action is being taken. It requires an intelligence-led targeting of the most high-harm individuals and key nominals (important suspects in the operation) within the organised crime group networks operating in the area.

Clear phase activity

Description

Targeted enforcement	<p>High-intensity arrest phase – informed by the development of local serious organised crime profiles and using data from all relevant sources, for example, using violence reduction unit (VRU) data where available. This phase involves intelligence-led targeting of key nominals.</p> <p>This can be combined with high-intensity, multi-agency disruption activity, making effective use of a range of disruption tactics and legislation. For example, prosecution for offences such as participation in serious organised crime.</p>
Days of action	<p>High-profile, visible policing with targeted disruption, using all available resources to flood the area. Includes partners from agencies such as the fire service, ambulance service, housing departments and trading standards. This ensures a coordinated, high-impact day and makes use of all available enforcement measures.</p>

Hold phase

The hold phase is important to:

- demonstrate a continuing police presence and commitment to ensure progression and further improvement in the area
- ensure the opportunities for other organised crime groups to move in are closed off

Hold phase activity	Description
Repeated days of action	Having repeated joint action and strike days, with visible local policing has proven effective. Involves multi-agency walkabouts in the area with local partners from housing and health to increase visibility within the community.

Hold phase activity	Description
Continued disruption activity	Neighbourhood officers with additional training in tackling serious organised crime continue to carry out 'mop up' arrests from initial investigations. Involves targeting peripheral nominals with disruption tactics – see the Menu of tactics . For example, the use of civil orders such as gang injunctions and serious crime prevention orders. Also involves working with partners to make best use of the legislation available. For example, working with housing departments to enforce closure notices and with Trading Standards.
	The shared ownership of local organised crime groups at the neighbourhood level ensures local tactical focus and momentum.
Reassurance policing focused on hotspots	Once the high level of presence seen during the clear phase has been scaled back, it's important to have something in place to maintain reassurance in the community for a longer hold period. For example, Merseyside ran Operation Felix for three months with a sergeant and three police constables, using geolocation technology to ensure their presence at hot spots.
Safeguarding	Involving local safeguarding and other partnership forums has enabled a more sustainable collaborative effort. It also informs a more holistic understanding of serious organised crime harm, particularly in relation to child sexual exploitation.
Overt searches	Searches of local areas – including rivers – have proven positive in both recovering items and sending a visible message to local communities.
Community clear-ups	Community clear-up campaigns are coordinated involving volunteers. For example, metal detector groups searching for disposed knives or weapons.
Community information	Involves ensuring the community is updated on ongoing work, including enforcement activity. All updates must be approved by community groups before publication.

Build phase

The build phase should be planned at the outset. It should happen throughout the CHB process once police and statutory agencies have obtained a meaningful foothold within the community.

Initial asset mapping is needed to:

- identify the key organisations who should be part of the strategic community group
- provide intelligence to support the targeting of the clear phase

The aim is to build enough community resilience to enable the police activity to be scaled down without risking a resurgence in organised crime activity, and for the community group to own the long-term response.

Build phase activity	Description
Community 'Dragons' Den' events to allocate funding	Funds are identified from all possible sources – including POCA funds, money from local businesses and CSPs – and the community is involved in choosing how these funds are spent. The events in Merseyside (called participatory budget events) have proved successful. Organisations propose initiatives for funding and the community members vote for those they would like to award the money to. Accountability is increased through community involvement.
Neighbourhood ownership	Local neighbourhoods own ongoing community improvement activity. This ensures long-term sustainability. The community building committee should be led by a member of the local community or a local partner rather than the police. Local organisations and partners should continue to participate in the community building activities and continue to communicate and engage the community.
Further developing community groups	This involves filling gaps identified by the community asset mapping to widen engagement – such as introducing events for groups that were not catered for by existing organisations or community facilities. For example, women's groups specifically for minority communities have been established in the Bradford Moor area.
School programmes	Programmes within schools about positive citizenship have been popular and enhanced community trust.
Youth involvement	Youth involvement and mentoring (for example, in schools, businesses and sports) is showing local positive impact in building both trust and resilience against organised crime group influences.

Build phase activity**Description**

	Ongoing community liaison provides an opportunity to hear ideas for continual improvement in the local area.
Continued local improvement	Regeneration of local areas through planting and tidying, supported by local volunteering networks, is having a good effect on community trust and confidence and reducing the fear of crime. For example, a new green space community garden was created to reclaim a play area being used by drug users. Local businesses provided materials for the community garden.
Reclaim buildings	Regeneration through better use of housing and building stock (for example, using derelict premises or reclaiming previous offending locations) is both a practical enhancement and evidence of the removal of serious organised crime influences. For example, garages used predominantly by drug dealers in Bradford Moor were demolished.
Improving local businesses	Bringing representatives of local businesses into the community groups can have a positive impact on improving the opportunities within the community. Local businesses are also impacted by crime and have a interest in supporting change through the CHB framework. They can provide support to enter employment, such as work experience, and skills development and funding.

Resources

Dedicated resources are important for the effective and sustained implementation of the CHB model. Sustained dedicated resource following the initial clear phase is important to maintain the hold phase. Buy-in from senior leaders may help to unlock the resources needed to maintain the momentum.

Further resources may need to be allocated, depending on both:

- updated demand shown by the serious organised crime local profile
- the additional intelligence brought by the implementation of CHB
- Some resources are essential and others are beneficial. These are shown in the following tables.

Essential resources**Description**

Analytical support	Dedicated analytical support helped to develop an assessment of serious organised crime to a more granular level, including its links to violence, drugs and more general crime.
Senior responsible officer (SRO)	This is often someone in the force serious organised crime unit. The SRO oversees the response and provides strategic leadership to the implementation of CHB. They should act as the conduit between neighbourhood policing team and senior leaders. They should work with both to ensure that CHB is an integrated part of the force and partner agency's wider response to the serious organised crime threat. This can include ensuring CHB is embedded within the appropriate strategic governance and setting up new strategic governance if required.
Lead responsible officer (LRO)	The LRO devises and leads the operationalisation of CHB – alongside partners and the community – in the target location. They should be responsible for establishing or identifying the existing appropriate operational and tactical governance used to deliver the CHB response. This will include identifying appropriate groups and partners at local community level to ensure sustained change under the build phase.
Joint action days	Access to resources for themed joint action days (with specialist and neighbourhood personnel) have been effective in arresting nominals and making a visible statement to local communities, particularly where repeated.
Enhanced intelligence	A local focus informed the understanding of organised crime groups and the wider threat of serious organised crime. This improved intelligence has enabled effective disruptive tactics, such as wider network links.
Community asset mapping	Having someone responsible for ongoing asset mapping is important to ensure this process is sustained and maintained.
Community building and partnership delivery lead	Having a delivery lead from a partner organisation or the community is important. This individual has dedicated time to focus on building community relationships and maintaining meetings with local organisations and key individuals working in the community. This is needed to maintain relationships, keep a focus on projects and maintain momentum of the build phase.
Partnership working	Joint working with partners can tackle underlying issues. For example, working with the local authority on housing has helped change the ecosystem of local targeted areas by getting more families into homes and tidying the environment.

Neighbourhood teams serious organised crime focus Giving ownership of serious organised crime to neighbourhood police empowers them to take action, rather than perceiving it as the responsibility of specialist teams. Training for neighbourhood officers can be helpful to support them in using disruption tactics

Beneficial resources	Description
Serious organised crime community co-ordinator (SOC CC)	SOC CCs can provide tactical guidance and support to LROs.
Financial investigation	Use of financial investigators to help follow the money has been effective.
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) liaison	Early conversations with the CPS have helped prepare for the intensity of court proceedings.
Fornsic support	Allocation of forensic support has helped manage the volume of work required, for example, for mobile telephone interrogation and expert drug witnesses.

Outcomes and impact

There has been no formal evaluation but there are initial findings from phase one and two of the pilot.

Bradford Moor

Bradford Moor (the BD3 Unite area) was chosen for implementing CHB because it covered wards with the highest MoRiLE threat scores and included the most deprived ward in the city. Progress was monitored against the MoRiLE score and also using crime severity scores (CSS) for a range of crimes often associated with serious and organised crime. These included serious violence, drug trafficking, organised acquisitive crime and robbery.

In Bradford BD3 area, the CSS monitoring showed a 37% reduction over six months. There was also a 30% reduction in serious violence offences, a 20% reduction in drug offences and a reduction in [MoRiLE threat scores](#) for the locations. Over the duration of the proof of concept period, the force reported a reduction in:

- burglaries of 57%

- drug offences of 27%
- anti-social behaviour of 38%

In addition, community surveys were used to identify problems that the local community felt negatively impacted their lives. This supplemented the quantitative data. The community surveys identified the following problems for residents.

- Drug dealing – gangs of predominantly teenage males congregating in the alleyways at the rear of the properties dealing drugs.
- Nuisance vehicles – vehicles speeding up and down the streets and often parked in the alleyways dealing drugs.
- Parking – often numerous uninsured vehicles in the street, many having been abandoned for a long period of time. Double parking was also a problem.
- Anti-social behaviour – nuisance youths in the area causing issues for local residents.
- Poor street lighting and litter.

Findings from the phase one pilot showed that CHB had the potential to work as an operational framework to significantly reduce serious organised crime and organised crime groups. Phase two was designed to further test and in more diverse locations.

Merseyside

From Merseyside, a successful clear phase was run in high-harm areas of Merseyside between August and October 2022. This yielded a significant increase in operational outcomes, including 420 arrests, 11 firearms seizures, 90 vehicle seizures and 78 warrants executed. The hold and build phases are ongoing in this area, together with monitoring of quantitative and qualitative output and outcome measures.

Learning and recommendations

Senior leadership buy-in

Buy-in from the outset by senior leaders of the force – including the police and crime commissioner (PCC) – can unlock resources that enable the implementation of CHB.

Ensuring that local senior stakeholders are aware and supportive of the initiative can reduce the likelihood of problems later on. For example, elected members and leaders of partner

organisations.

Realism about time scales for impact

Senior leaders need to 'hold their nerve' as it can take years to genuinely improve a community's prospects. Improvements must come from the community to be sustained. It takes time to build confidence, capacity and capability within the community. It also takes time to identify those with the skills to ensure the relationships, activities and infrastructure of partnership work is maintained longer term.

Dedicated resource

To ensure sustained success, there needs to be organisational awareness of the resources required to implement CHB over the long term. The old model of a crack down before moving on to the next location has been shown not to work. Sustained dedicated resources are required to hold the location for long enough to build enough community resilience, so that police resources can be scaled back.

Having the right people

It's important to identify who the credible community representatives and key influencers are in the communities and get them on board.

Understanding the data

Getting a holistic picture of the total threat of serious organised crime – using data from all relevant agencies – is important to understand geographic harm at a local level. Outcome measures need to be determined at the outset, so baseline data can be recorded and data can be collected consistently throughout.

Joint communications

Communications about the initiative should be agreed with all partners in advance. Some of the stakeholders on the ground could be put in danger if it's seen they gave information to the police that facilitated arrests or other police action against key local crime gang members.

Managing CHB as a continuous process

It's important to have the next stages ready, especially for the hold phase. Hold is the first step that's different to previous or traditional ways of addressing serious organised crime. This is

because it acknowledges that making arrests alone is not enough. Getting the hold stage prepared to provide a seamless move towards build is vital to realise the difference offered by the CHB framework.

Branding

It's important not to use police language or acronyms in the branding of the initiative. CHB is a collaborative multi-agency approach about building up the community. CHB should be explained in terms that everyone understands and have a name that resonates with the whole community.

Resources

- Serious organised crime community coordinators have a toolkit to support forces and standardise delivery of CHB. You can [access the toolkit in the National Serious Organised Crime Community Coordination group on Knowledge Hub](#) (you will need to log in).
- See our [Menu of tactics](#) for the disruption of serious organised crime.

Tags

Neighbourhood policing Organised crime group