

# **OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DOORSTEP CRIME UNIT ANNUAL REPORT 2010- 2011**



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**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**

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## 1.0

### Introduction

This year has seen a couple of changes in Doorstep Crime Team personnel. A seconded Police Officer joined the team in June and Philippa Green's position became permanent to enable the team to deal with the huge rise in reported incidents.

#### Seconded Police Officer

The re-introduction of the police officer has helped massively in the success of the team. PC Jayne Newman has brought with her incredible experience and knowledge and has been trained by the Police in dealing with vulnerable witnesses. She has undertaken further training which has enabled her to do in depth intelligence searches. As Jayne has a long police service, she has many contacts within Thames Valley Police which has enabled the team to gain access to other available investigatory options e.g. Scenes of Crime facilities (SOCO), finger print analysis, DNA matching, Video Identification Parade Electronically Recorded (VIPER) and most importantly getting offenders arrested and bailed.

#### Arrests and prosecutions

The team has seen 31 offenders arrested this year which is the highest reported number of arrests in a year. Two offenders received a total of seven years imprisonment for taking £880,000 from two victims in Oxfordshire. The team has other big cases pending and one is listed for a three week hearing at Oxford Crown Court in November 2011. These cases and the work of the Doorstep Crime team have again been well supported by the press.

## **2.0 Results & Analysis**

### **2.1 Complaints and Referrals Received**

The Doorstep Crime Team dealt with 182 complaints in 2007/08. In 2008/9 the team dealt with 265 complaints, an increase of 45%. In 2009/10 the reported incidents totalled 400, a 50.9% increase. This financial year 2010/11 the team has received 524 incidents, an increase of 124 (31%).

Complaints received from various Agencies are shown in figure 1 below:

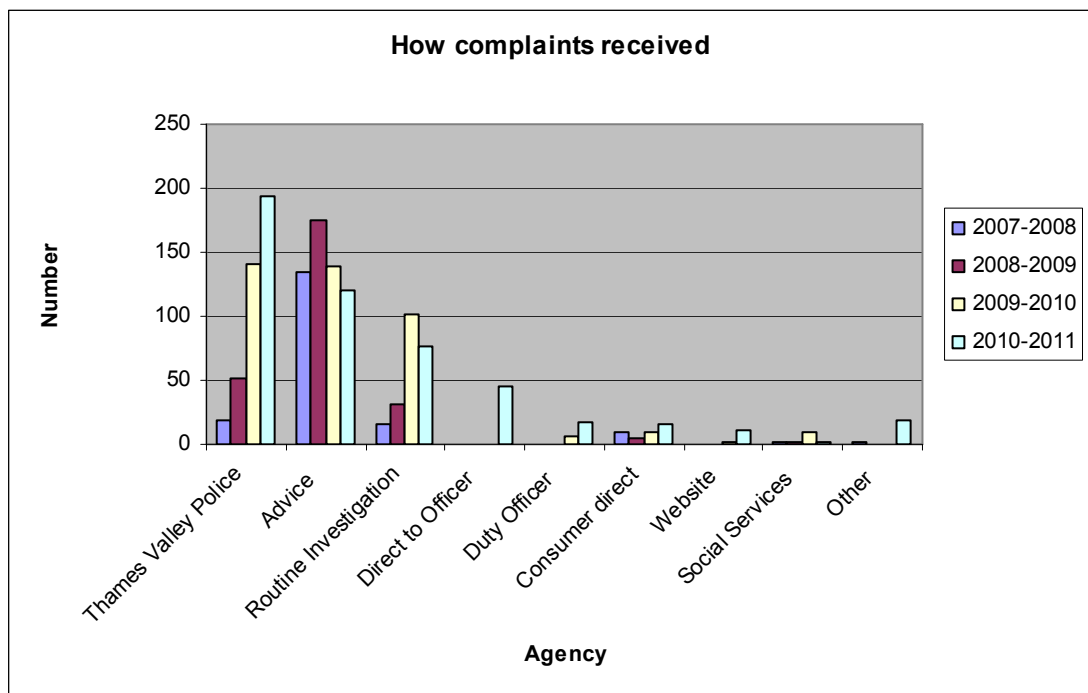


Figure 1

This graph illustrates that the reporting mechanism is changing and Thames Valley Police is the highest reporting agency. This year TVP referred 193 incidents to us compared to 140 last year, an increase of 53 (37%).

The number of reported incidents to the advice team last year was 139, this year they received 121 calls, a drop of 12.9%.

In 2009/10 the team made it a priority to carry out more routine patrols to spot, identify and disrupt these rogue traders. It proved successful and the team identified 101 incidents from carrying out these patrols. However, the team were unable to carry out as many routine patrols due to the amount of incidents being called into the Service so we have seen a drop to 76 (24%).

The team also saw a rise in referrals from Consumer Direct from 10 last year to 15 this year. The team only received two calls from Social Services, a large drop from last year's figure of 10. Eleven incidents have been reported via the Trading Standards website.

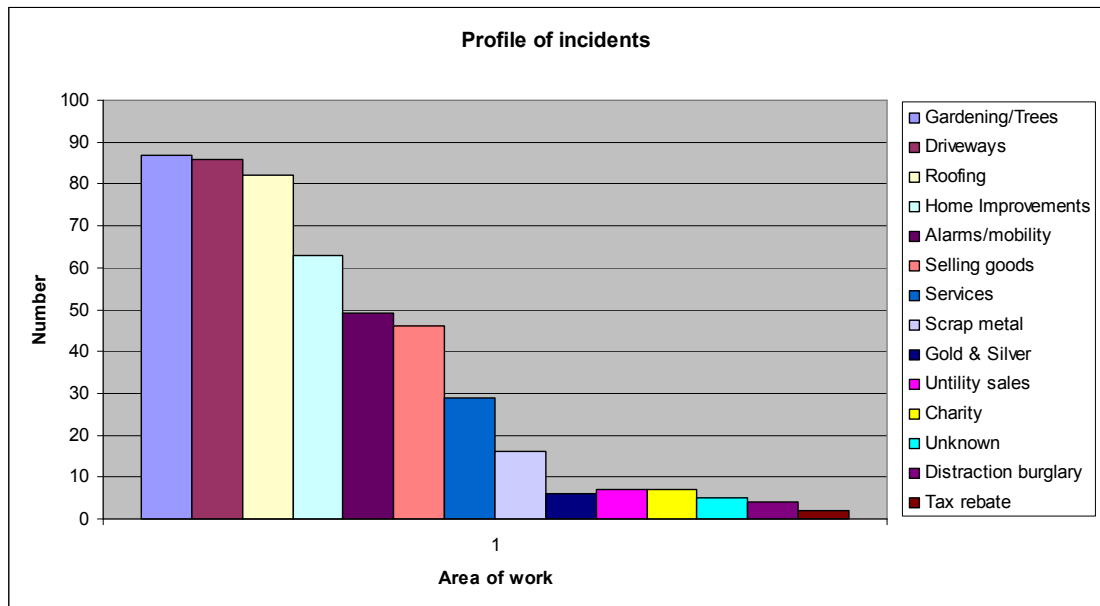
### **Summary**

- Thames Valley Police is now the main referral agency.
- In-house Consumer Advice Team is receiving fewer calls
- Routine patrols have dropped due to the amount of complaints being received.
- Increase of incidents being reported online
- Decrease of complaints received from Adult Social Services.

## 2.2 Profile of Incidents

The type of work being carried out by the offenders is mainly driveways, roofing, home repairs and gardening. See figure 2 for profile of incidents.

Figure 2



In 2010/11, there was an increase in the number of complaints regarding tree and gardening work. This is due to a number of gangs operating from the Cherwell area. They have already been identified and in April, two arrests were made and there are further arrests pending. It is hoped that we will see a large decrease in these incidents once those offenders have been apprehended.

### Summary

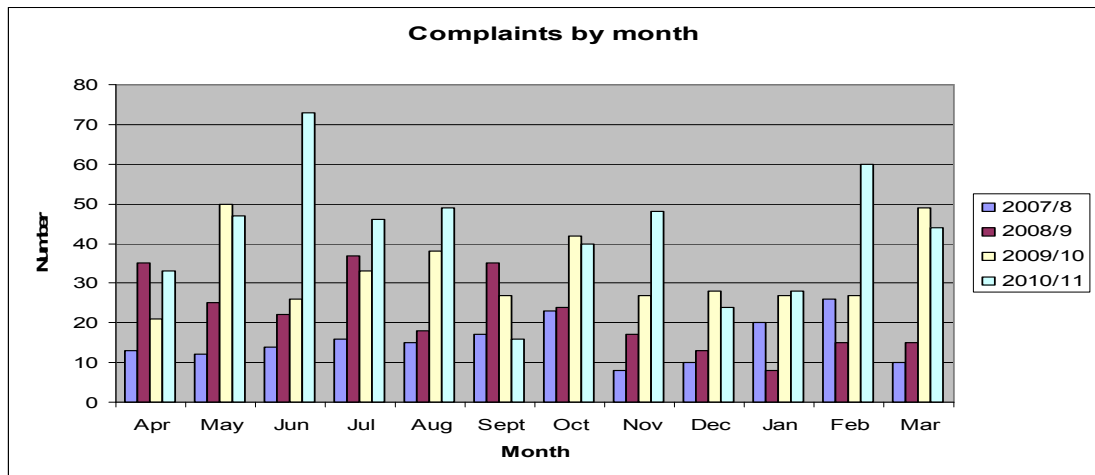
- Garden and tree work has become the most popular area of Doorstep Crime.
- Driveways, Roofing and guttering services continue to generate a high proportion of doorstep crime complaints.

### 2.2.1 Complaints received by month

The fourth successive increase in complaints has meant the team has again been under huge pressure. Figure 3 below shows the complaints received by month.

During June 2010 there was a big increase in activity this was due to participating in Operation Rogue Trader. February however, saw the figure double from the previous year. This may be due to the bad weather in December and January, which prevented these opportunists from working. Looking at these figures and the growth of complaints being received there is predicted an increase in complaints for 2011/12.

Figure 3



#### Summary

- The team has seen a huge increase in doorstep crime being reported to Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards.

### 2.3 Complaints by Area

When the complaints are divided into geographical area, (see figure 4) it shows that there has been a big shift in where the incidents occur. Vale and Cherwell have seen a massive rise in incidents. The West, South and Oxford have seen a decline. Cherwell and Vale have been specifically targeted by two different gangs operating in and around where they live. (Figure 5 shows the previous years incidents for comparison).

Figure 4

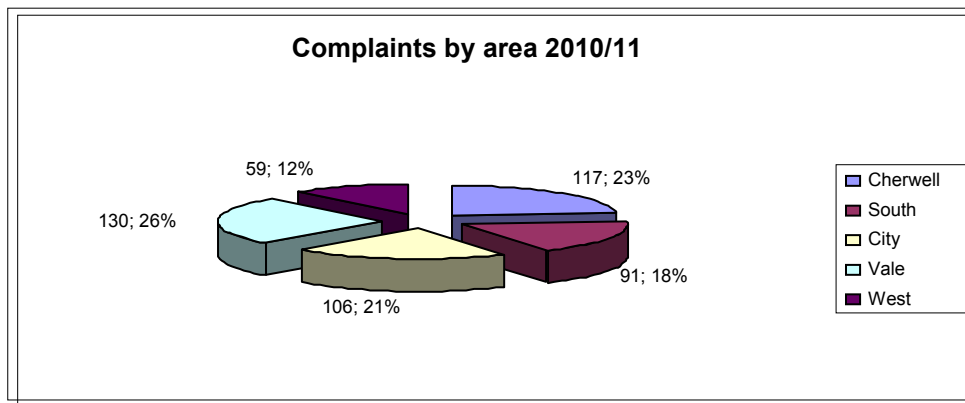
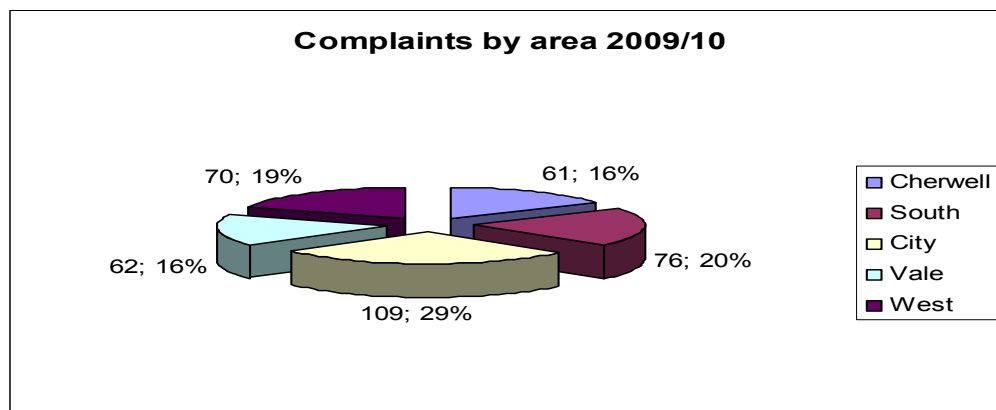


Figure 5



#### Summary

- Increase in incidents in Cherwell and the Vale.

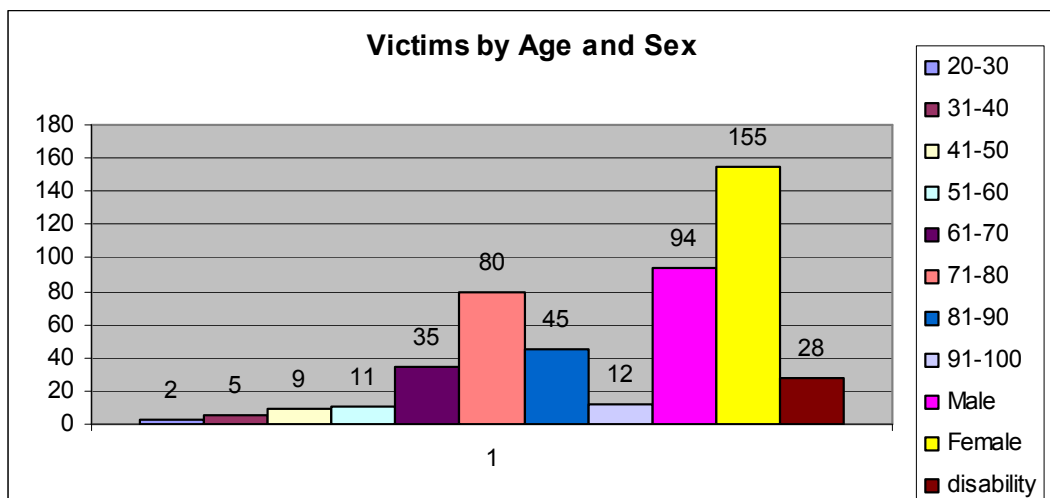


## 2.4 Complaints by Age and Sex

In 2010-2011 the team obtained victim profiles for a total of 160 victims. Out of the 160 ages recorded during 2010/11, the figures show that there were 16 crimes against victims aged under 60 compared to 26 last year. There was a total of 144 out of 160 crimes against victims aged 61 and above. (See figure 5)

Significantly, 249 victims were living alone and 155 of those victims were lone females. The oldest victim targeted was a 94 year old female living alone. 28 victims were found to have been particularly vulnerable as a result of disability.

Figure 5



### Summary

- Oxfordshire's profile show that 144 of the 160 victims were 60 years or older.
- A high proportion of victims are living alone

### **3.0 Action taken by Doorstep Crime Unit**

#### **3.1 Prosecutions and Action undertaken**

During 2010/11 Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards and Thames Valley Police instigated a number of actions against individuals. The most significant case resulted in sentences of 4.5 years and 2.5 years handed out to two offenders who took £880,000 from two elderly victims.

In 2010/2011 the team took a decision to issue more formal warning using Section 8 of the Enterprise Act as a way of dealing with the less serious cases to allow resources to be focused on the more serious offences. A total of 24 formal undertakings were signed and seven simple cautions were issued. See figure 6 for action taken through the courts. See figure 7 for other incidents dealt with by way of a fixed penalty tickets.

#### **3.2 Pending Prosecutions**

At the time of writing there are a further five Doorstep Crime cases pending and court dates have been arranged. There are further investigations ongoing and waiting to go through the legal unit.

### **3.3 Arrests made due to actions of the Doorstep Crime Unit**

Last year the team facilitated 23 arrests. This year the figure has increased to 31. This has been possible because of the seconded police officer. During these arrests, three of the vehicles were seized by Thames Valley Police.

### **3.4 Interventions**

The Doorstep Crime team placed more emphasis on finding and dealing with the offenders when they are at the victims address. This is done by routine patrol or immediately responding. The team has successfully intervened on 79 occasions where the offender was at the premises. This is an increase on last year's figure of 69.

### **3.5 Assisting Victims after incident**

Another objective for the team was to offer the victims assistance after the incident. All the victims were given a list detailing the traders on the Trading Standards Buy With Confidence Scheme. This year, the team referred 55 victims to various organisations i.e. Crime Reduction Officers, Fire Service, Falls assessment and district councils.

### **3.6 Money Paid by Oxfordshire Victims to Doorstep Criminals**

The amount of money paid by victims this year to doorstep criminals has been £816,456. This is a slight increase on last year figure of £736,304. The average loss per incident however is down to £1,294 as compared with last year's figure of £1,812.

### **3.7 Money saved for Oxfordshire Consumers**

In the year 2010/2011 the Doorstep Crime team intervened to save Oxfordshire consumers £127,766, slightly above last year's figure of £122,644.

### **3.8 Intelligence Reports**

As a team, we have realised the importance of intelligence being shared between Enforcement Agencies. The Doorstep Crime Unit has passed 176 Intelligence reports to other agencies this year compared to 146 in 2009/10 and 136 for 2009/8.

### **3.9 Identification of Offenders**

Of the 524 incidents received the team has been able to identify 444 of those offenders. This is a huge increase on last year's figures of only 132 offenders being identified in 400 incidents.

### **3.10 Presentations to various groups etc.**

This year the team has given talks and presentations to different community groups. Talks were also given to Thames Valley Police, Police Enquiry Centre (PEC). PEC receives all the calls coming into Thames Valley Police and they then allocate the incidents. The talks to PEC have been vital and it is these talks that have increased the awareness of the team's role within Thames Valley Police. The Doorstep Crime team will continue to do the talks to other enforcement agencies i.e. Police.

### **3.11 Repeat Victim Cameras**

One of the highlights this year has been the purchase of three camera kits that can be placed at a property if we think the offender will return. These have proven very successful. In four months the kits have been used in seven properties resulting in four filmed detections. This is where the offender has returned and he has been identified by the

team. One of the incidents included the offender returning to get money from a £506,000 scam.

The kits are different from the type used by the police as this kit sends the film footage instantly to a laptop in the office. The team is able to look at the footage and if they do not recognise the caller they will contact the victim instantly to establish who they are and to make sure they are alright.

The victims also get a feeling of security once these are fitted, as it gives them back that feeling of reassurance because someone is looking out for their welfare.

### **3.12 ANPR (Automatic number plate recognition)**

The equipment has been upgraded and is a very useful tool used in identifying those vehicles used in doorstep crime. The team are now working aside Thames Valley Police on monthly ANPR checks.

### **3.13 Media Coverage**

This year was another good year for media coverage both on the TV and in local papers. It included a feature on the local news with the cameras following the team during Rogue Trader Week. The team also managed to get front cover coverage three times in the Oxford Mail.

The team also managed to get good coverage from the recent court case that saw the imprisonment of Scott Jackson. This report was headline feature on both on Central and Meridian TV.

The work of the team was also recognised through the award of an MBE to the team leader in the New Year's honours list.

**Summary**

- There has been a slight increase in interventions.
- Money saved was £127,766. (Up on last years figure).
- Money paid out by victims was £816,456. (Up on last years figure)
- The Team has generated 146 Intelligence reports this year
- This year the team saw 31 offenders arrested. This is the highest number of arrests in one year ever.
- The Team has made headlines with the Oxford Mail and featured on Central News, Meridian and Watchdog.

**4.0 Action Plan for future enforcement**

Below is a plan the team has for the coming year

<b><u>Recommendation</u></b>	<b><u>How to achieve</u></b>	<b><u>Time scale</u></b>	<b><u>Cost</u></b>	<b><u>Benefit to be achieved</u></b>	<b><u>Importance rating</u></b>
Install camera equipment for repeat victims	Obtain further kits so that the team can put out more cameras to provide protection for vulnerable adults.	Ongoing	Officer time and cost of equipment	Enable TS to film and obtain evidence for prosecution of offenders.	☆☆☆☆☆
Assistance for Victims	To assist the victims of doorstep crime by referring other agencies to assist if required by victim. i.e. Social Services, Crime Reduction Officer etc.	Immediate	Officer time	Can be done when visiting victim to obtain statement	☆☆☆☆
Routine Patrols	Carry out weekly routine patrols.	Immediately	Officer time	Disrupt and identify offenders.	☆☆☆☆
Working partnership with Social Services	Establish contacts in Social Services for updates and pass on victim details to the Service so they can offer assistance.	August 2011	1 Officer time	More eyes to identify potential infringements	☆☆☆

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<p>Dedicated phone line</p>	<p>Because Oxfordshire are changing to Consumer Direct next year I recommend that a separate doorstep crime team line should be put into place in preparation for this change. A dedicated Doorstep Crime reporting line will enable Thames Valley Police, members of the public and other agencies to have a one stop number for which they can report an incident. The line would be answered by a team member from the doorstep crime team. The number must be transferrable so that the officer taking the calls can still carry out routine duties whilst maintaining the dedicated line.</p>	<p>April</p>	<p>Cost of 1 telephone line</p>	<p>One stop telephone number for all agencies and complainants</p>	<p>☆☆☆☆☆</p>
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#### **4.0 Conclusions**

The re-introduction of the seconded police officer has made a huge improvement in identifying defendants. Out of 524 incidents, 444 of the offenders were identified. This has resulted in the highest amount of arrests in one year. Because of this the team has also dealt with more investigations. The team has carried out approximately 10 property searches and three vehicles have been seized by the Police as a result of doorstep crime incidents. When the drivers were dealt with and a PNC check carried out, it was established that some had no insurance or driving licence.

The Police Officer Jayne Newman has helped the team deal with vulnerable victims and has enabled statements to be obtained from victims using video technology. Due to the contacts we have made with Thames Valley Police, we are having much more success with Scenes of Crime Officers (SOCO) and this has resulted in offenders being identified by fingerprints and DNA samples.

The continued routine patrolling has ensured the team disrupt the offenders' activities and sends out a clear message to all that enforcement agencies are checking businesses. By carrying out these checks we protect the reputable businesses whilst dealing with those who have more disrespectful intentions.

Letters have been sent to repeat victims for the third year. This letter is sent out every six months and reminds the home owner to beware of traders that may call at their door. At each incident we ascertain if the victim has been a victim of doorstep Crime. The list has been increased from 15 victims to 64. None of those people on the list have called to report any further incidents.

It is really pleasing to report that sanction detections have increased from 39 in 2009/10 to 93 for 2010/11, a massive jump of 138%.

To establish if work was unnecessary or was not carried out, the team hired in a Surveyor. The cost was rising for this expert witness, so a cheaper option was sourced. By using a different expert witness we have reduced the annual cost from £15,637 to £3,908 a saving of £11,729.

2010/11 has been a challenging one due to the increasing number of complaints received. The challenge this year is how to deal with the complaints if they continue to grow at the same rate as we have seen in the last four years. If this happens the team will have to rethink how it operates, as we will not be able to offer the same level of service to all complainants. The team is a committed group with a common interest and go beyond their remit, which includes working unsociable hours. By operating in this way the team has coped with the increasing workload and each member has helped to make the team successful.

In the coming year, there are a couple of big cases going through Oxford Crown Court. These have been achieved through the huge efforts of the team over the last couple of years.

Martin Woodley, MBE  
Trading Standards Officer