



HOME OFFICE

Reducing Vehicle Crime

The National Audit Office scrutinises public spending on behalf of Parliament. The Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, is an Officer of the House of Commons. He is the head of the National Audit Office, which employs some 800 staff. He, and the National Audit Office, are totally independent of Government. He certifies the accounts of all Government departments and a wide range of other public sector bodies; and he has statutory authority to report to Parliament on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies have used their resources. Our work saves the taxpayer millions of pounds every year. At least £8 for every £1 spent running the Office.

Published by TSO (The Stationery Office) and available from:

Online

www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

Mail, Telephone, Fax & E-mail

TSO

PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN

Telephone orders/General enquiries 0870 600 5522

Fax orders 0870 600 5533

Order through the Parliamentary Hotline

Lo-call 0845 7 023474

E-mail book.orders@tso.co.uk

Textphone 0870 240 3701

TSO Shops

123 Kingsway, London WC2B 6PQ

020 7242 6393 Fax 020 7242 6394

68-69 Bull Street, Birmingham B4 6AD

0121 236 9696 Fax 0121 236 9699

9-21 Princess Street, Manchester M60 8AS

0161 834 7201 Fax 0161 833 0634

16 Arthur Street, Belfast BT1 4GD

028 9023 8451 Fax 028 9023 5401

18-19 High Street, Cardiff CF10 1PT

029 2039 5548 Fax 029 2038 4347

71 Lothian Road, Edinburgh EH3 9AZ

0870 606 5566 Fax 0870 606 5588

The Parliamentary Bookshop

12 Bridge Street, Parliament Square,

London SW1A 2JX

Telephone orders/General enquiries 020 7219 3890

Fax orders 020 7219 3866

TSO Accredited Agents

(see Yellow Pages)

and through good booksellers.

£10.75

ISBN 0-10-293204-2



9 780102 932041

HOME OFFICE

Reducing Vehicle Crime

LONDON: The Stationery Office
£10.75

Ordered by the
House of Commons
to be printed on 24 January 2005

This report has been prepared under Section 6 of the National Audit Act 1983 for presentation to the House of Commons in accordance with Section 9 of the Act.

John Bourn
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office

18 January 2005

The National Audit Office study team consisted of:

Philip Gibby and Sarah Mason under the direction of Aileen Murphie

This report can be found on the National Audit Office web site at www.nao.org.uk

For further information about the National Audit Office please contact:

National Audit Office
Press Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria
London
SW1W 9SP

Tel: 020 7798 7400

Email: enquiries@nao.gsi.gov.uk

© National Audit Office 2005

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	1
PART 1	
Numbers of thefts of and from vehicles have fallen significantly	8
A large number of vehicles are broken into or stolen	9
The British Crime Survey estimates the number of thefts of and from vehicles has fallen by 30 per cent since 1999	11
Despite the reduction, vehicle crimes continue to endanger lives, cause owners distress and inconvenience, and increase the cost of motoring	12
PART 2	
The Home Office has co-ordinated measures to achieve significant reductions in vehicle crime	14
The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team has proved an effective body in co-ordinating initiatives	15
Vehicle crime has also come down because of a range of other external factors	16
Our examination focused on Home Office actions to tackle thefts of and thefts from vehicles	16
PART 3	
Improvements in vehicle security help deter criminals	18
The Home Office has encouraged manufacturers to improve security	19
Additional improvements in vehicle security could reduce crime further	20



PART 4

Police forces and local communities are becoming better equipped to tackle vehicle crime 24

The Police can find it difficult to engage local organisations to address vehicle crime 25

Police detection rates for thefts of and from vehicles are relatively low 26

PART 5

Progress in improving the security of car parks has been more limited 28

Closed Circuit Television Cameras have reduced vehicle crime, although performance varies 29

Many car park operators believe improved security is only part of the answer to making car parks safer 30

PART 6

Data held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency are crucial and need to be accurate 32

A significant minority of vehicle records are inaccurate 33

The Agency has set a target to halve the estimated number of unregistered vehicles by 2007 and instigated several initiatives to improve data accuracy 34

PART 7

Further progress is needed in targeting offenders 36

Although the Home Office has introduced measures to make it more difficult for criminals to sell stolen vehicles or parts, progress has been limited 37

The Home Office has worked with the Police to develop a range of initiatives to target offenders and has also introduced a prolific and other priority offenders strategy 39

PART 8

The Home Office has committed considerable resources to raising public awareness 42

The Home Office has made good progress in running a publicity campaign which has contributed to the reduction in vehicle crime 43

Locally-run publicity campaigns organised in conjunction with other initiatives have also been effective 44

APPENDICES

1 The number of thefts of and from vehicles per 1,000 population in 2003-04, by Police Force 45

2 Our audit approach 46

SUMMARY



1 The British Crime Survey 2003-04 estimated there were 2.1 million thefts of vehicles and from vehicles (including attempted thefts).¹ Vehicle crime causes distress and inconvenience for the owner. In a significant minority of cases such crimes can also endanger life: the Police recorded 12,000 incidents of aggravated vehicle taking and 63 deaths due to vehicle crime. The Home Office set a target in 1999 to reduce thefts of and from vehicles by 30 per cent over five years and this report examines progress in meeting that target.²

2 In order to deliver the target, the Home Office established a Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team comprised of representatives from the motor industry, academia, Police, public servants in local and central Government (including the Home Office) and published its strategy in 1999. The Team has taken an active role in overseeing implementation of the strategy. The Vehicle Crime Reduction Section and the Police Standards Unit within the Home Office are responsible for developing policy, ensuring initiatives are implemented, providing advice and guidance and monitoring Police performance. The Home Office has also provided Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and other local bodies with £927 million since 1999 to fund projects to reduce crime, of which a proportion is to combat vehicle crime.

3 Home Office expenditure on reducing vehicle crime is a relatively small proportion of the £5.5 billion dedicated to delivering Home Office Aim 1 – a reduction in crime and fear of crime. The large numbers of vehicle crimes, however, means the cost of such crimes to society are considerable. The insurance industry paid out £564 million for motor theft claims in 2003. A research project commissioned by the Home Office estimates the total cost of thefts of and from vehicles amounts to some £1.9 billion in 2003-04, and attempted thefts a further £0.2 billion.³

The Home Office has been successful in reducing thefts of and from vehicles

4 The Home Office is on track to meet its target which is a significant achievement. Based on figures from the British Crime Survey 2003-04, the number of thefts of and from vehicles (including attempts) has reduced by 30 per cent since 1999. The Home Office, in conjunction with the motor industry, Police and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have contributed to this decrease, although some of the reduction in vehicle crime is also likely to be due to other factors, such as economic growth and falling unemployment. The Home Office, in conjunction with

¹ The British Crime Survey is regarded by the Home Office as the most authoritative source for assessing crime levels as it measures people's direct experiences of crime and is not affected by reporting or recording changes. The number of crimes recorded by the Police is dependent on the crime coming to the attention of the Police and whether the incident should be recorded as a recordable offence within the categories laid down by the Home Office. The Home Office counting rules were revised in 1998 to incorporate a wider range of offences and further updated in April 2002 to incorporate the National Crime Recording Standard. The introduction of the standard has meant crimes are recorded if the victim perceives an offence to have been committed rather than when the Police satisfy themselves that a crime has occurred.

² The target focussed on thefts of and from vehicles and did not include vehicle vandalism. The Home Office confirmed that vehicle vandalism is addressed by other initiatives such as wider use of Closed Circuit Television Cameras, better street lighting and the introduction of Police Community Support Officers.

³ Costs are based on 1999 estimates of unit costs in the Home Office Research Paper 217 'The economic and social costs of crime' 2000, and numbers of crimes come from the British Crime Survey 2003-04.

other organisations has instigated a number of initiatives which have contributed to the reduction (see Figure 1) and our assessment of progress indicates that the initiatives should lead to further reductions.

5 Improvements in vehicle security are likely to be a main reason for the reduction in thefts of vehicles and the Home Office has worked consistently and effectively

with the motor industry to bring about such changes. The European Union requirement for all new cars to be fitted with an electronic immobiliser has made it more difficult for criminals to steal a car without keys. The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team has also proved effective in bringing together different organisations to tackle a difficult problem and the approach could be adopted for other policy initiatives.

1 Initiatives to reduce thefts of and from vehicles

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 Improved vehicle security. The Home Office has worked with the motor industry to bring about improvements in new cars. | Good progress. The improvements are likely to be one of the main reasons for the reduction in thefts of vehicles. |
| 2 Better enforcement by spreading good Policing practices. The Home Office has worked with Police Forces to improve the detection and prosecution of offenders. | Steady progress. Police detection rates for vehicle crime remain low compared to other offences. However, the introduction of Automatic Number Plate Recognition systems could lead to significant improvements. |
| 3 Making a safer environment by improving car parking security. | Slower progress. The Home Office has worked with the Police and car park operators to improve security, including providing funding of £106 million over four years through the Capital Modernisation Fund to install Closed Circuit Television Cameras in 1,222 car parks. Not enough car park operators belong to the Safer Parking Scheme, although numbers have begun to increase in 2004. |
| 4 Improving the information available on vehicles so the Police are better equipped to tackle vehicle crime. The Police rely on data from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency when they stop motorists, but the data can be inaccurate. | Slower progress. Maintaining fully up to date data on every vehicle is difficult as people do not always notify the Agency when they move house. A survey by the Agency in 2003 established that approximately 90 per cent of vehicle records and 82 per cent of driving licences were sufficiently accurate to enable the Police to trace the relevant person. Although a subsequent survey in 2004 established that only 68 per cent of vehicle records and 70 per cent of driver records were fully accurate (similar to the percentages estimated by the National Audit Office in 1993), in many cases the errors were relatively minor. The Agency reports the introduction of continuous registration from January 2004 has led to a 20 per cent increase in the number of motorists notifying them when they have disposed of their vehicle and this, together with other initiatives, should mean the database is more up to date. |
| 5 Better regulation of the salvage industry and targeting of criminals. The Home Office funded the National Criminal Intelligence Service to undertake three projects to help tackle organised criminal gangs and to make it more difficult for offenders to benefit from vehicle crime. | The Home Office and Department for Transport have introduced legislative change to tackle criminal activity in the motor salvage industry, but further progress is required. Loopholes in the regulations on number plates mean criminals could still purchase plates from unregistered suppliers in Northern Ireland and Scotland, although the Road Safety Bill currently before Parliament will extend the regulations to the whole of the United Kingdom. The Department for Transport has introduced a Vehicle Identity Check scheme to deter criminals from using the identities of written-off vehicles to sell on stolen cars. In addition, the Home Office has introduced a requirement for Local Authorities to maintain a register of motor salvage operators in their area. The Home Office recognised that implementation was key and commissioned MORI to undertake a survey to measure progress. Over half of the 200 local authorities surveyed had either not yet set up a register of salvage operators or did not have any operators on its register. The Home Office funded projects to help tackle organised vehicle crime showed only limited progress over the period 2001-02, although the National Criminal Intelligence Service confirmed that changes were made in 2002 and afterwards with the aim of assessing the scale and nature of organised vehicle crime, better identifying the most serious organised criminals and producing timely intelligence reports that the Police could act on. |
| 6 Raising motorists' awareness of the risks of vehicle crime through communications and publicity. | Good progress. The Home Office has run a number of publicity campaigns to raise awareness. The campaigns are very likely to have contributed to the reduction in thefts of and from vehicles. |

Source: National Audit Office

There remains scope to achieve further reductions

6 Notwithstanding the significant achievement of the last few years, numbers of vehicle related crimes remain high and other challenges need to be addressed to reduce such crimes further. The Police sometimes find it difficult to engage local organisations to tackle the problem. Although the position is improving, too few car parks provide a sufficiently secure environment for motorists to leave their car safely. Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have sometimes ‘reinvented the wheel’ by not using lessons learned elsewhere. Although the Home Office provides Partnerships with good practice advice, this could be improved by making it more up to date and user-friendly. Home Office Regional Office Directors need to make sure the advice from the Police Standards Unit, Crime Reduction Centre and the Home Office is taken into account when funding future Partnership projects to reduce vehicle crime.

7 Some models of car remain easier to break into and only a relatively small proportion of vehicle crimes are cleared up by the Police. Further improvements could be achieved if the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency database were more accurate, statutory regulation of number plate suppliers were extended to Scotland and Northern Ireland and the Local Authorities and Police implemented and enforced the statutory regulation of the motor salvage industry more consistently.

Our main findings in more detail

The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team has proved a useful method of working with the motor industry and other organisations to make vehicles more difficult to steal

8 Manufacturers have a key role in reducing the number of thefts of vehicles. Most of the manufacturers we interviewed recognised that the Home Office and the vehicle insurance industry had liaised closely to encourage improvements in vehicle security. The broad consensus amongst the manufacturers we interviewed is that they are doing all they can to improve vehicle security and are reliant on technological advances for further progress. Thatcham security assessments show there continue to be variations in the relative security of each model of car, which suggests further improvements can be made.

More criminals could be deterred from breaking into vehicles if the Home Office encouraged local organisations to work together more effectively

9 Tackling vehicle crime requires collaboration between a range of local organisations, including the Police and local authorities and other public bodies working together in the forum of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, car park operators and voluntary and community organisations. Crime reduction projects run by Partnerships have sometimes ‘reinvented the wheel’ by not using lessons learned elsewhere.

10 Approximately 20 per cent of thefts of and from vehicles in 2003-04 were from car parks. Whilst 25 per cent of the Police Basic Command Units surveyed by the National Audit Office described the involvement of car park operators in tackling crime in their area as ‘high’, 32 per cent considered their involvement to be ‘low’. Of the 30 car park operators we interviewed, 14 were not participating in local area initiatives to reduce vehicle crime. The Police (in association with the British Parking Association, and with £965,000 of funding from the Home Office since 2001) developed a Secured Car Park Scheme to improve safety and security for motorists. The ACPO Secured Car Park Joint Steering Group, which included Home Office representatives as well as Police and industry representatives, set a target to have 2,000 car parks in the Secured Car Park Scheme by March 2000. The target was referred to in the vehicle crime strategy developed by the Team. But only 1,350 car parks in England and Wales were involved by March 2004 and there were only 132 secured car parks available in hospitals and just 125 at railway stations. Our interviews established the main reasons why operators had not participated included ignorance of the scheme and a concern that the cost of structural changes required would outweigh the benefits.

11 The scheme was revised in 2004 to reduce the administrative burden on car park operators. The introduction of the Safer Parking Scheme in October 2004 has led to an increase in numbers. The scheme organisers reported that there were 1,633 Award holders by December 2004 and a further 163 car parks were due to be assessed or the associated operator had expressed an interest in applying for the Award. The scheme organisers confirmed that all of the major national car park operators and most train operators either belonged or were seeking to belong to the revised scheme. The Home Office has confirmed it has put the industry on notice that it will review, in April 2005, the progress made by car park operators in reducing crime and all options, including legislative change, will be considered.

Further reductions in vehicle crime are partly dependent on the Police increasing the proportion of cases they are able to clear up

12 Whilst it is clearly better to prevent a crime occurring rather than to detect a crime once it has taken place, the risk of detection can deter someone from attempting to commit a crime. Although the overall level of vehicle crime has reduced by 30 per cent according to British Crime Survey figures, the vehicle crime detection rate (which refers to the proportion of offences that result in an offender being fined, cautioned, charged, summoned or no further action being taken) is low. Only six per cent of thefts from vehicles and 13 per cent of thefts of vehicles were resolved in 2003-04, compared to an average of 23.5 per cent for all crimes recorded by the Police.

13 The Automatic Number Plate Recognition system is a relatively new approach to tackling vehicle crime and offers considerable scope to improve detection rates. The technology can be deployed on a road to photograph passing vehicles, process images of the vehicle number plates, and to alert Police Officers almost immediately of those vehicles that should be stopped so the driver can be questioned. The results of a pilot in 23 Police Forces suggest the technology has been successful. The Police stopped 180,543 vehicles during the 13 month pilot and made 13,499 arrests. However, the number of arrests as a proportion of Police time spent on the initiative varied considerably. The variations were partly due to the time required to set up the equipment in more remote locations and also because some forces had been able to deploy resources more effectively as a result of more up front work to identify crime hotspots.

14 The Automatic Number Plate Recognition system and other Police initiatives rely, in part, on data from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to verify the details of each driver and vehicle stopped. The Agency estimates that there are probably 950,000 vehicles on the road in the United Kingdom for which they do not have up to date data and which have been unlicensed for more than three months. A survey commissioned by the Agency in 2003 estimated that approximately 90 per cent of vehicle records were sufficiently accurate for the Police to trace the registered keeper. A significant minority of vehicle records do contain one or more inaccuracies, however, although many are relatively minor in nature. A survey in 2004 established that 32 per cent of vehicle records contained an inaccuracy: similar to the percentage when the Committee of Public Accounts last examined the accuracy of the data in June 1994.

15 The Police Standards Unit within the Home Office has provided Police Commanders with guidance on tackling vehicle crime which, although the advice pre-dates the pilot of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system, has proved useful. Around half of the initiatives have been reviewed. However, the guidance could be more user-friendly and one approach would be to structure it around the five key questions we identified – see [Figure 2](#).

16 Reducing thefts of and from vehicles also depends on tackling organised criminal gangs. The British Crime Survey has estimated that 47 per cent of stolen cars and light vans were not recovered. The Home Office take this as an approximate measure of the extent of organised vehicle crime, with the vehicles being re-sold under different identities, stripped for parts or exported. A Home Office evaluation of three projects (covering the period 2001-02) to tackle the problem found that the initiatives could have been more successful if the Police had given a higher priority to organised vehicle crime by providing more timely information to the National Criminal Intelligence Service and acting more promptly on the information received. Similarly, the Police expressed some reservations and the National Criminal Intelligence Service confirmed that changes were made in 2002 and afterwards with the aim of assessing the scale and nature of organised vehicle crime, better identifying the most serious organised criminals and producing timely intelligence reports that the Police could act on.

Further progress is required to make it more difficult for criminals to benefit from stealing vehicles

17 It remains too easy for criminals to disguise the identity of a stolen vehicle. All number plate suppliers and motor salvage operators in England and Wales must now be registered, but gaps remain. Number plates can still be bought from unregistered suppliers in Northern Ireland and Scotland, although the Department for Transport confirmed the Road Safety Bill currently before Parliament contains powers to extend the register to these countries. Regulations, which came into force in October 2002, required every local authority to establish a register of motor salvage operators from October 2002 so the Police could inspect registered premises and take action against motor salvage operators who were trading whilst unregistered. The Home Office introduced the legislation to tackle criminal activity in the motor salvage industry. The department recognised that implementation was key and commissioned MORI to undertake a survey to measure progress. The survey of 200 Local Authorities with

high levels of vehicle crime established that by June 2004, 26 per cent had not yet set up a register of motor salvage operators. And 42 per cent of the Authorities with a register had not received any registration applications from local motor salvage operators. The Home Office confirmed it has written to its Regional Directors to ask them to press Local Authorities to fulfil their obligations. The Home Office has also developed guidance for Police, Local Authorities and the motor salvage industry on the regulations, which is available on its website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk).

2 Guidance to the Police could be structured around five key questions

- What is the profile of crime in the area?
- What actions would be most effective to tackle problem locations, victims and offenders?
- How should available resources be prioritised to achieve the biggest impact on vehicle crime?
- Can local partner agencies help me with delivering initiatives?
- How will I monitor the impact of the initiatives undertaken?

Source: National Audit Office

18 The introduction of the Vehicle Identity Check scheme in April 2003 has sought to deter criminals from selling stolen cars with a false record. Inspectors check the Vehicle Identity Number of a car that has been written-off and then repaired to confirm, so far as possible, that the details are the same as those on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency vehicle register and also check that there is clear evidence that the vehicle has been repaired to correct the damage noted in the insurer's report. The Department for Transport believe the scheme has contributed to the reduction in the number of car thefts and regard it as very successful, although the British Vehicle Salvage Federation has questioned the merits of the scheme. As the scheme

acts as a deterrent to criminals using the identity of salvaged vehicles to sell on stolen vehicles, it is difficult to obtain clear evidence on the extent to which car 'ringing' has reduced. However, Department for Transport analysis of British Crime Survey estimates shows that thefts of vehicles reduced from 278,000 in the British Crime Survey 2002-03 before the Vehicle Identity Check Scheme was implemented in April 2003 to 241,000 in the British Crime Survey 2003-04 (a reduction of 13 per cent).⁴ The Association of Chief Police Officers has also confirmed that it believes the scheme is likely to have a significant impact on vehicle crime.

Raising public awareness of vehicle crime is key to reducing thefts from vehicles

19 Motorists and vehicle owners can reduce the risk of someone breaking into their vehicle by keeping it secure and not leaving valuables and property in view. The Home Office funded a major public information campaign on this issue between 2000 and 2004 at a cost of £26 million. The Home Office confirmed that vehicle crime prevention is also an important strand of the £7.1 million Home Office acquisitive crime prevention campaign running in 2004-05. Analysis of areas where the advertising ran showed a fall in both thefts of and thefts from vehicles of two to three per cent and one to two per cent respectively per hundred television ratings bought (a television rating is a unit expressing the size of the audience watching that specific advert). There is also evidence from the Reducing Burglary Initiative⁵ that locally run publicity campaigns can reduce offending when aimed at offenders themselves and our examination of Operation Cobra in Portsmouth suggests that local communications campaigns combined with police operations can achieve results. Local public awareness campaigns were closely co-ordinated with other initiatives to target potential victims and to discourage prolific offenders from committing further offences.

⁴ The British Crime Survey is a household survey of people's experience of crime and it defines "vehicle" as a car, van, motorcycle, scooter or moped which is either owned or regularly used by anyone in the household.

⁵ Reducing Burglary Initiative: the Role of Publicity in Crime Prevention, 2003 Home Office Research Findings 213.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- i** Regional Home Office Directors should draw on the guidance and advice available on vehicle crime to assure themselves that vehicle crime reduction projects proposed by Partnerships are well thought through and are cost effective.
- ii** The Home Office should further encourage all hospitals, railway companies and Local Authorities to participate in the Safer Parking Scheme. The Home Office should demonstrate the benefits of the scheme to the relevant central government departments to encourage them to set targets for implementation.
- iii** The Police Standards Unit should summarise existing guidance, including advice on how to use the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system, into a more readily usable format for Police Commanders.
- iv** The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency should improve the accuracy of its vehicle and driver databases. The Agency should explore the possibility of obtaining up to date names and addresses from the electoral register or private sector businesses so that it could write to drivers and vehicle keepers to update records.
- v** The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency should, as a matter of priority, seek to close the loop-hole that can allow criminals to purchase number plates from unregistered suppliers in Northern Ireland and Scotland.



- vi The Home Office should remind Local Authorities of their obligations to set up a register of Motor Salvage Operators.
- vii The Home Office should explore further how, as well as having a national dimension, future public information campaigns on vehicle crime should be more targeted towards local concerns and co-ordinated with other local initiatives run by the Police and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.
- viii The Home Office should use its crime reduction grants to encourage Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and the Police to use local media to highlight crime reduction initiatives, for example, the relative safety of different places to park a vehicle which might also provide an incentive for car park operators to take action to make their car parks more secure.
- ix Local public information campaigns would be an opportunity for the Home Office to raise public awareness of the security assessments available for each make and model of car.

PART ONE

Numbers of thefts of and from vehicles have fallen significantly



A large number of vehicles are broken into or stolen

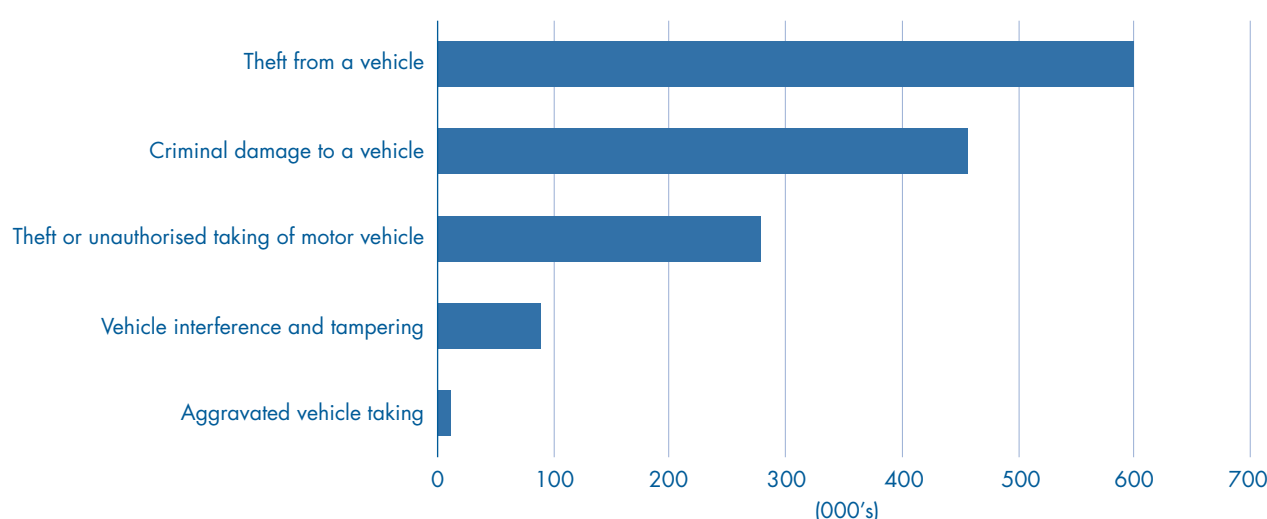
1.1 The large number and high value of cars, motorcycles and other vehicles on the road means they are particularly likely to be subject to criminal activity; such crimes include the theft of vehicles, items stolen from inside a vehicle and criminal damage as well as the use of stolen cars by individuals undertaking criminal activity. There were around 22.5 million cars, 0.4 million goods vehicles and 0.9 million motor cycles and mopeds in England and Wales in 2003. The Police recorded 1.5 million vehicle crimes in 2003-04, almost one in four of all crimes they recorded. The main offences were theft from a vehicle and criminal damage (see Figure 3).

1.2 The extent of vehicle crime is much higher than the numbers recorded by the Police. The Home Office's British Crime Survey 2003-04 estimated that there were

241,000 thefts of a vehicle, 1,337,000 thefts from a vehicle, 543,000 attempted thefts and 1,437,000 cases of vehicle vandalism.⁶ Whilst nearly all thefts of vehicles are reported to the Police, victims do not necessarily report thefts from a vehicle to the Police if they consider the incident to be trivial or believe there is nothing the Police can do about the crime.

1.3 The Home Office had a specific Public Service Agreement target to reduce thefts of and from vehicles (including attempts) by 30 per cent over the period 1998-99 to 2004. The target focused on thefts of and from vehicles and did not include vehicle vandalism. Vehicle vandalism is addressed by other initiatives, such as wider use of Closed Circuit Television Cameras, better street lighting and the introduction of Police Community Support Officers. This report examines progress in reducing thefts of and from vehicles to achieve the target of a 30 per cent reduction.

3 Vehicle crimes recorded by the Police in 2003-04



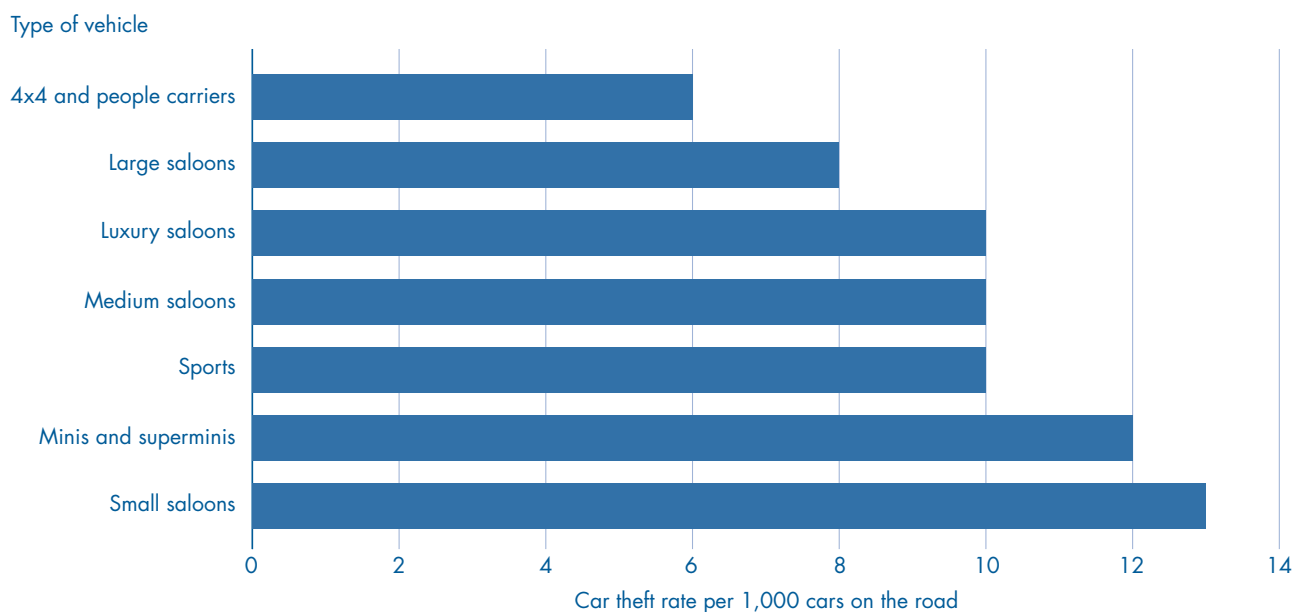
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Police recorded crime data for 2003-04

⁶ The number of thefts of vehicles recorded by the Police exceeds the estimated number in the British Crime Survey because the Police numbers include attempted thefts and the Survey does not include commercial vehicles stolen.

1.4 Drawing upon our discussions with insurers, the motor industry and the Home Office, five main factors determine the likelihood of a vehicle being broken into:

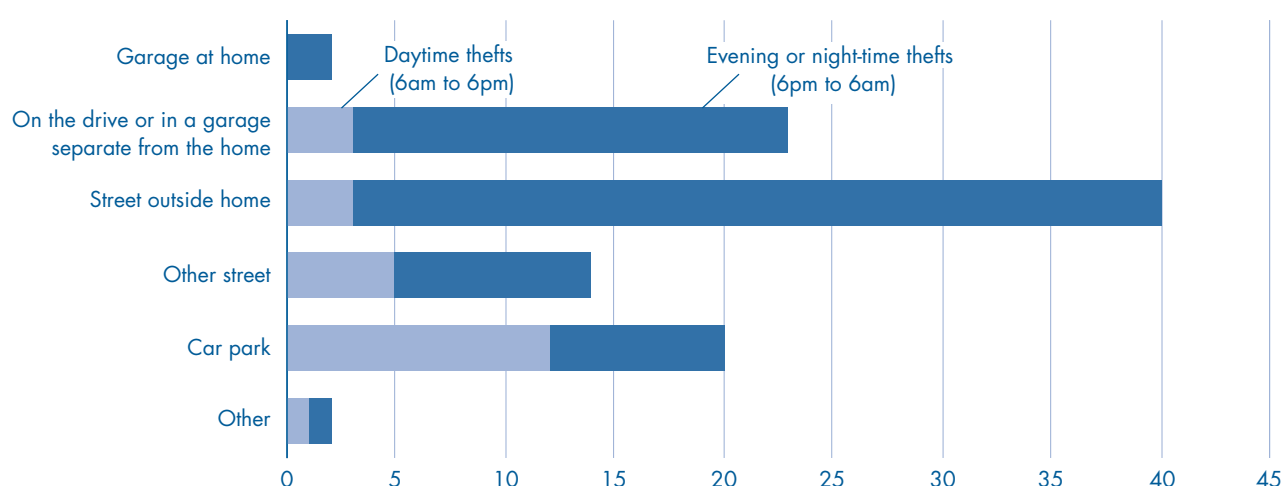
- **The type of vehicle.** Some types of vehicles are more likely to be stolen or broken into than others. **Figure 4** shows the incidence of thefts of vehicles for the main types of car. The variations are partly due to the security features available and the relative value of each car.
- **Where the vehicle is kept.** The highest volume of thefts occur at night in the street outside people's homes and during the day from car parks. **Figure 5** shows the typical location and timing of vehicle-related thefts in 2003.
- **The surrounding area.** Vehicle crime tends to be concentrated in urban areas. The Home Office British Crime Survey estimates that 15 per cent of households in inner city areas and 17.5 per cent of households in areas with a high level of perceived anti-social behaviour were subject to thefts of or from their vehicle in 2003, compared to an average in England and Wales of 9.7 per cent.
- **The age of the vehicle.** A greater proportion of older vehicles are stolen than newer ones, partly because of the security features now available.
- **The age of the vehicle owner.** Vehicle owners aged 25 years or less were more likely to be a victim of a theft of or from their vehicle than other age groups (17.5 per cent compared to an average of 9.7 per cent).

4 The car theft rate per 1,000 vehicles on the road in 2002, by type of vehicle



Source: Car Theft Index 2003

5 Location and timing of vehicle-related thefts in 2003-04



Source: National Audit Office analysis of British Crime Survey data 2003-04

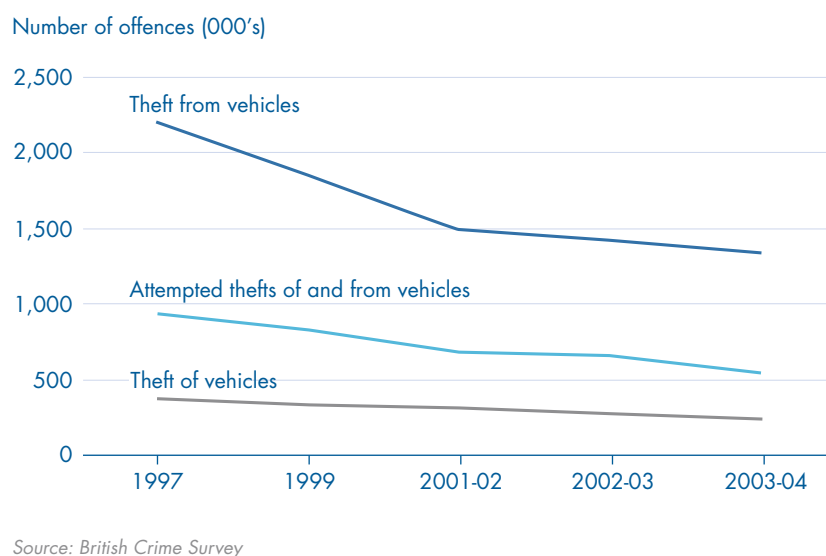
The British Crime Survey estimates the number of thefts of and from vehicles has fallen by 30 per cent since 1999

1.5 The Home Office vehicle crime target was initially measured by numbers of crimes recorded by the Police, but increases in the frequency of publications of British Crime Survey estimates and changes in the way crimes were recorded from 2002 led the Home Office to change the way the target was measured to the numbers of crimes estimated through the British Crime Survey instead. The British Crime Survey for 2003-04 estimates that the number of thefts of and from vehicles (including attempts)

reduced by 30 per cent since 1999, although the timing of the survey means that figures for 2004-05 will not become available until July 2005. **Figure 6 overleaf** shows the reduction in thefts of and from vehicles (including attempts), and the reduction in cases of vehicle vandalism since 1997. Police records indicate that the number of thefts of and from vehicles declined by 17 per cent between 1998 and 2003-04, although these figures do not take into account the changes made in 2002 with the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard. The Home Office considers that the National Crime Recording Standard has inflated the number of crimes recorded and in 2002-03 estimated that it had increased the recorded crime figures for thefts of and from vehicles by eight per cent.⁷

7 National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS): an analysis of the impact on recorded crime. Home Office on-line report 31/03, published July 2003.

6 The British Crime Survey shows a reduction in all types of vehicle crime since 1995

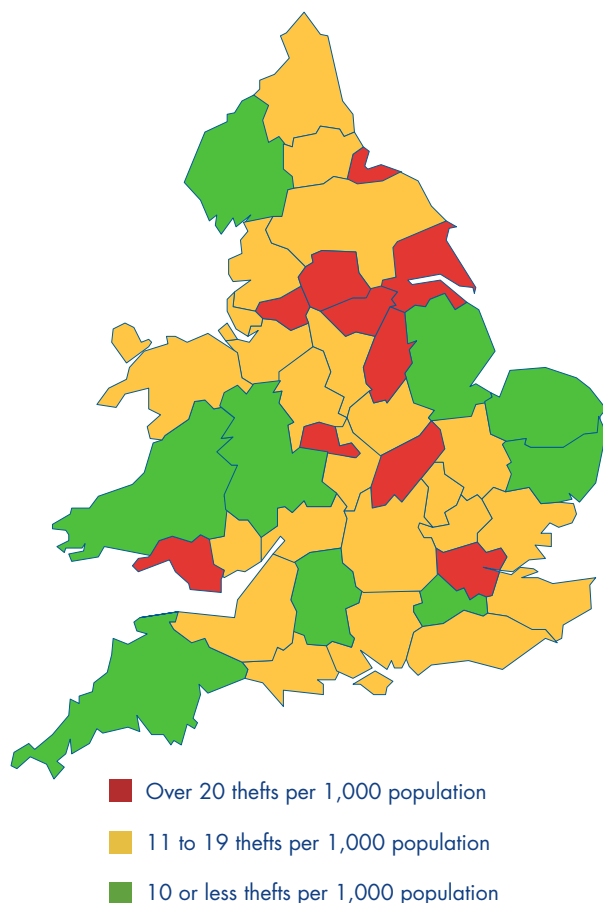


1.6 Our analysis of recorded crime data for 2003-04 showed that there were more than 20 thefts of and from vehicles per 1,000 of the population in 10 Police forces, whereas nine forces had ten or less vehicle-related thefts per 1,000 population (see [Figure 7](#), and Appendix 1 for data on each Police force). There are also variations between Police Basic Command Units with similar characteristics – for example Birmingham recorded 9.9 thefts of vehicles and 14.1 thefts from vehicles per 1,000 of the resident population in 2003-04, compared with Nottingham, who recorded 13.8 thefts of vehicles and 30 thefts from vehicles per 1,000 population in the same period.

Despite the reduction, vehicle crimes continue to endanger lives, cause owners distress and inconvenience, and increase the cost of motoring

1.7 Owners and the public can be at risk if they interrupt a criminal attempting to break into a vehicle or encounter an offender driving a stolen vehicle. There were 12,000 incidents of aggravated vehicle taking, and the Police recorded 63 deaths due to vehicle theft related incidents in 2003-04, mainly people killed either for their car or by joyriders in a stolen vehicle.

7 The rate of thefts of and from vehicles per 1,000 population varies across Police forces



Source: National Audit Office analysis of recorded crime data

1.8 Owners typically experience distress and inconvenience if their vehicle is stolen or broken into (see Box 1). According to the British Crime Survey 2003-04, 15 per cent of the public have a high level of worry about car crime and the previous year's survey found that 81 per cent of victims said that they were emotionally affected by the experience. The most common reactions were anger, annoyance and shock.⁸ The residents we interviewed expressed a range of reactions about their experiences of vehicle crime, including anger, a feeling of violation, becoming more security conscious and inconvenience caused by being unexpectedly without a car.

BOX 1

The views of residents in two areas

"We'd only been back up here for a bit, and my daughter she is a severe epileptic as well and in the middle of the night we had to rush her to hospital and I went out to get the car and it was gone".

"It's people's pride and joy because they've spent a lot of money on it and once your car's stolen, although you do get it back you know it's not the same".

1.9 Vehicle crime has a large financial cost to society. Using the cost estimates prepared by the Home Office in 2000, thefts of and from vehicles cost society some £1.9 billion in 2003-04, and attempted thefts a further £0.2 billion.⁹ The Association of British Insurers reports that United Kingdom insurance companies paid out £564 million in 2003 for motor theft claims. The insurance companies we interviewed explained that it was difficult to quantify what proportion of a typical insurance premium covered the risk of vehicle crimes, but they estimated that between 5 per cent and 12 per cent of the cost of claims in 2001 related to thefts of or from vehicles and confirmed that premiums were influenced by vehicle security (see Box 2).

BOX 2

The views of motor insurance companies

"In short, poor vehicle security leads to higher insurance prices for the customer and can impact on vehicle sales".

"Insurers have made it plain that improved security means the vehicles are going to be lower rated and that's going to reduce costs".

⁸ 2002/03 British Crime Survey, 2002-03.

⁹ Costs are based on 1999 estimates of unit costs in the research paper 'The economic and social costs of crime', Sam Brand and Richard Price, Home Office Research Paper 217, 2000. The number of incidents was estimated through the British Crime Survey.

PART TWO

The Home Office has coordinated measures to achieve significant reductions in vehicle crime



2.1 Our key findings are:

- The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team has proved an effective body in co-ordinating initiatives.
- Vehicle crime has also come down because of a range of other external factors.

The Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team has proved an effective body in co-ordinating initiatives

2.2 The Home Secretary set up the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team to develop the Home Office's five year strategy and oversee implementation of actions to meet the Government's target of a 30 per cent reduction in thefts of and from vehicles by 2004. The Team, chaired by a Director of Motability Operations (who was formerly a Director of the Ford Motor Company), includes representatives from motor manufacturers and dealers, insurers, academia, a motoring organisation, the Police, and local and central government. It meets about once every three months to discuss emerging issues and identify actions required.

2.3 Our analysis of the records of the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team meetings found that the Team had played a key part in pressing different organisations to address vehicle crime. The Team has brought together the Home Office, Police, Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the motor industry to discuss concerns and determine actions. Team members have demonstrated commitment to achieving improvements and the Team had helped different organisations to work together effectively.

2.4 The Home Office have developed vehicle crime and motor salvage toolkits on its website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk) which includes good practice and advice aimed at practitioners. The website includes some good practice examples, including the Luton Autolok project, which won the 'Tenants Participation Advisory Service Partnership into Practice' competition and the Metro Gateshead Project.

2.5 Our report on reducing crime established that Partnerships had often 'reinvented the wheel' by not using lessons learned elsewhere. The Home Office could better support Partnerships with more up to date, user-friendly, good practice advice drawn from experienced practitioners and is currently working on a project (Improving Performance through Applied Knowledge – IPAK) to collate and disseminate good practice knowledge. Home Office Regional Directors need to make sure the advice from the Police Standards Unit, Crime Reduction Centre and the Home Office is taken into account when funding future vehicle crime reduction projects.

Vehicle crime has also come down because of a range of other external factors

2.6 Other external factors are also likely to have contributed to the reduction in vehicle crime. Some vehicle insurers thought the reduction in vehicle crime in England and Wales was largely due to unemployment falling together with improvements in security – **see Box 3**. The Home Office has identified a close link between unemployment rates and numbers of thefts of and from vehicles; the British Crime Survey (2002-03) identified a high correlation between changes in unemployment and changes in vehicle crime. National statistics record a steady reduction in the unemployment rate since 1993. The offenders we interviewed considered the need for money to be a key reason for attempting to break into a vehicle and, therefore, it is likely that the fall in unemployment rates could have contributed to the reduction in vehicle crimes. Home Office research indicates Police recorded numbers of thefts of vehicles have declined in many European countries between 1997 and 2001, although only Denmark, Germany and Hungary achieved bigger reductions.¹⁰ One reason for the reduction is likely to be because the European Union required all new cars to be fitted with an immobiliser from October 1998 so that the engine is electronically disabled if anyone attempts to tamper with the ignition switch.

BOX 3

Vehicle insurers consider the reduction in unemployment and improvements in security to be the main reasons for the reduction in vehicle crime

“The core reason for the reductions in theft seem to be the reduction in unemployment and improvements in vehicle security made by motor manufacturers and encouraged by insurers and the general public. It seems likely that Home Office initiatives have contributed to the general recognition of theft, particularly ‘from’ vehicles, but it is less clear that this has actually reduced vehicle crime.”

Vehicle Insurer

“Yes, the general trend in thefts has been a reduction. However, it would seem that the prime driver of the change is the reduction in unemployment.”

Vehicle Insurer

Our examination focused on Home Office actions to tackle thefts of and thefts from vehicles

2.7 This report examines Home Office actions to tackle thefts of and thefts from vehicles. The report builds on the findings of our examination of crime reduction.¹¹ **Figure 8** demonstrates the main elements of the Home Office strategy to tackle thefts of and thefts from vehicles and how each part of this report examines the progress made.

2.8 In carrying out this examination we sought evidence from a range of sources. **Figure 9** summarises our approach and the purpose of each methodology. Further details are in Appendix 2.

¹⁰ Barclay, Tavares, Home Office International Comparison, 2003.

¹¹ Reducing Crime: the Home Office working with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, HC 16, 2004-05.

8 The structure of this report summarises progress against the main strands of the Home Office strategy to tackle vehicle crime

Home Office vehicle crime strategy

- Improved security on new cars.
- Better enforcement by spreading good police practices.
- Making a safer environment by improving car parking security.
- Improving the information available on vehicles so the Police are better equipped to tackle vehicle crime.
- Better regulation of the salvage industry and number plate suppliers and targeting criminals.
- Raising motorists' awareness of risks through communications and publicity.

NAO report structure

- **Part 3** of the report examines how improvements in security have made new cars more difficult to steal or break into, although there is scope for further improvements.
- **Part 4** of the report examines how Police forces and local communities are better equipped to tackle vehicle crime.
- **Part 5** of the report examines why progress in improving the security of car parking has been slow.
- **Part 6** of the report examines how the Home Office has worked with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to improve the data available to the Police and local organisations, but further progress is required.
- **Part 7** of the report examines why the Home Office has only made limited progress in targeting offenders and improving the regulation of the motor salvage industry. This part also examines the progress made by the Department for Transport in implementing the Vehicle Identity Check scheme.
- **Part 8** examines how the Home Office has sought to raise public awareness, although local campaigns run alongside other crime reduction initiatives can also be effective in tackling vehicle crime.

Source: *Tackling Vehicle Crime, Home Office 1999 and the National Audit Office*

9 Our sources of evidence in carrying out this examination

Method

- Analytical review of crime statistics.
- A telephone survey of insurers, manufacturers, car park operators and car dealers.
- Visits to four Police forces. We interviewed key staff about the impact of initiatives to reduce thefts of and thefts from vehicles in their area.
- We commissioned Professor Wikstrom from the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge to review existing research on vehicle crime reduction.
- Interviews with key stakeholders, including the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the Association of Chief Police Officers.
- We commissioned MORI to carry out focus groups with selected persistent offenders and local residents in Hackney and Chesterfield.
- Census of Chairs of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and Police Divisional Commanders.

Purpose

- To identify crime trends and assess the relative performance of the 376 Partnerships and 272 Police Basic Command Units.
- To explore the views of key stakeholders on what has driven reductions in vehicle crime, the effectiveness of Home Office initiatives and what more could be done to achieve further reductions in crime.
- During discussions we explored local strategies and what was driving crime trends. We also reviewed projects with the aim of identifying good practices in reducing crime.
- Alongside our own review of projects, existing evaluations provided key evidence on the effectiveness of crime reduction initiatives.
- To gain understanding of the involvement of other bodies in vehicle crime initiatives and seek feedback on the role of the Home Office.
- To gain understanding of offenders' motivation for committing crime and residents' views on whether initiatives have impacted on vehicle crime in their area.
- The postal questionnaire, also used for our previous study "Reducing Crime: the Home Office working with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships", sought opinions and information on the role of the Home Office, local strategies and performance against targets.

PART THREE

Improvements in vehicle security help deter criminals



The Home Office has encouraged manufacturers to improve security

3.1 Manufacturers have a key role in reducing vehicle crime. Improvements in vehicle security make it more difficult for a criminal to steal or break into a vehicle. Our interviews with motor manufacturers established that they regard vehicle security as very important but most believe customers do not want to pay for it. The price and look of the vehicle are regarded as higher customer priorities when purchasing a new vehicle. Nevertheless, manufacturers are aware that vehicles without sufficient security features require a higher insurance premium, which might deter customers.

3.2 The Home Office has encouraged manufacturers to improve security by working closely with the Department for Transport and the Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre (Thatcham) to develop a New Car Security Ratings scheme which is owned by the insurers. The scheme, launched in July 2001, highlights the relative security of different vehicles; the index is available at www.thatcham.org and the website also provides details of the associated British Insurance Car Security Awards. The Home Office has also published a security rating based on the proportion of vehicles stolen each year; the Car Theft Index 2004 is available at www.secureyourmotor.gov.uk.

3.3 Most of the manufacturers we interviewed recognised that the Home Office and the vehicle insurance industry had liaised closely to encourage improvements – see **Box 4**. Five of the eight manufacturers we interviewed confirmed that the Thatcham security testing was an influence on the design of their vehicles. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders also confirmed to us that its relationship with the Home Office has been critical in improving vehicle security. **Figure 10 overleaf** illustrates some of the main security devices available on a typical car. **Figure 11 on page 21** shows that a greater proportion of older vehicles were stolen than new cars in 2003.

BOX 4

The Home Office has encouraged manufacturers to improve security

"To be honest, if the insurance scheme didn't exist and the Home Office hadn't driven them forward to do that, we probably would still be in the same situation as ten years ago in terms of car theft. ... It is sad to say but we wouldn't really add on security for the sake of the customer really. We have to have a reason to do it."

Vehicle Manufacturer

10 Examples of the security devices available on a typical car

Immobiliser An immobiliser stops the vehicle from being driven away. An electronic immobiliser disables the electrical system and engine, a mechanical immobiliser locks the steering wheel, gear lever or pedals in position.

Dead locking This disables the normal lock functions and prevents the thief opening the car from the inside by breaking the window and using the release handle.

Glass Etching All the glass on the vehicle is etched with the vehicle's identification number.

Alarm The system sounds an audible warning when the vehicle is tampered with.

Locking wheel nuts These help prevent the thief from stealing the wheels using a standard wheelbrace.

Sensors A volumetric sensor will set off the alarm if a thief enters the vehicle. Perimeter protection will set off the alarm if a thief opens the door, boot or bonnet.

Coded Audio Equipment The radio/stereo has a secret code to stop it working if stolen.

Tracking Systems Tracking devices fitted to cars send out signals, which help the Police locate a car if stolen.

VIN - Vehicle Identification Number A unique 17 digit number stamped on various parts of the vehicle. Motorists should check the VIN markings for signs of tampering before purchasing a vehicle.

Central Locking Enables the whole vehicle to be locked with just one operation of a key or remote control.



Source: The definitions were drawn from the Glossary of Vehicle Security Features, Vehicle Security Listing, MIRRC, July 2004

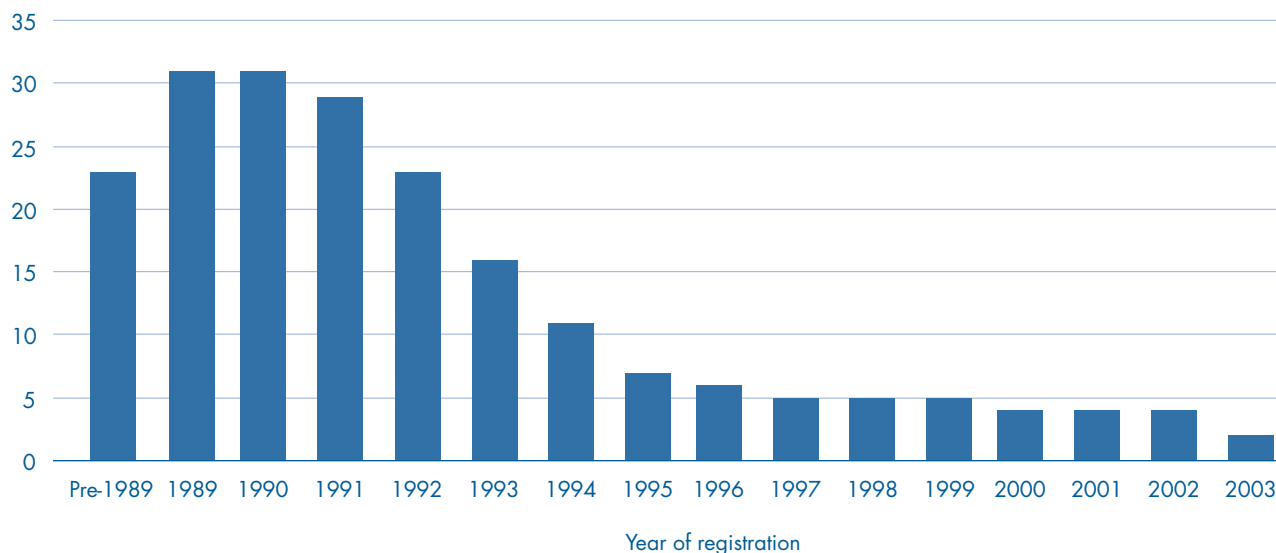
Additional improvements in vehicle security could reduce crime further

3.4 The Home Office faces a challenge in maintaining the commitment of motor manufacturers, the insurance industry and other key organisations to reduce thefts of and thefts from vehicles. The broad consensus amongst the manufacturers we interviewed is that they are doing all they can to improve vehicle security. The Home Office consider the Thatcham Category 5 Criteria for After-Theft Vehicle Recovery Systems has the potential to make significant reductions in thefts of vehicles by increasing the risk of apprehension for criminals and reducing the value of stolen vehicles. The system would enable stolen vehicles to be tracked and for a device to be activated remotely which will prevent an engine being re-started once it has stopped for more than 40 seconds. However, the technology

has yet to be adopted by manufacturers. Our interviews established that manufacturers remain doubtful about other new initiatives (see Figure 12) and feel they are reliant on technological advances to improve vehicle security. The reduction in thefts of and thefts from vehicles also means there is less of a financial incentive for the insurance industry - all but one of the insurers we interviewed said insurance payouts had reduced and the Association of British Insurers estimated that claims for theft now account for around seven per cent of payouts, compared with around 14 per cent in the early 1990s. Some manufacturers thought insurers do not provide customers with sufficient incentives to own vehicles with added security and they should offer bigger discounts on premiums to drivers of vehicles with added security features. The Association of British Insurers, however, confirmed that many insurers already provide such incentives.

11 The proportion of vehicles stolen in 2003, by age of vehicle

Car theft rate per 1,000 cars on the road



Source: Car Theft Index 2004

12 Manufacturers' reservations on some possible vehicle security innovations

Innovation

Laminated side windows to make it difficult for thieves to break into a vehicle.

Using pin codes instead of keys to start the vehicle.

Building a 'safe box' into the vehicle.

Views of Manufacturers

The idea is generally viewed as costly and there is concern that it will have limited benefits.

Manufacturers expressed concern about the long term security of pin codes, the inconvenience for motorists of having to enter a code each time they start their vehicle and the possibility people will forget the code.

Manufacturers commented that a safe box would take up space, could cause problems in a crash and that motorists who leave valuables on display are unlikely to use the box.

Comments

"On the laminated side glass we are investigating it very strongly but currently it is a little expensive, it is four times as much. Also that would be four times as much for the customer as well. But we are definitely interested in it."

"They were not very effective. After a period of time the four digits you have to use are evident on the keypad. So you bring a several trillion combination down to a few thousand. You can be fairly lucky and end up with the right one. I would say they are not very customer friendly. You could have a senior moment and forget your code."

"I think the problem you have, I don't think that would help, people tend to break into cars when they can see things. And if you leave valuables on display on your car then you are not any more likely to put it into a safe box in the boot than you are in the glove box out of sight."

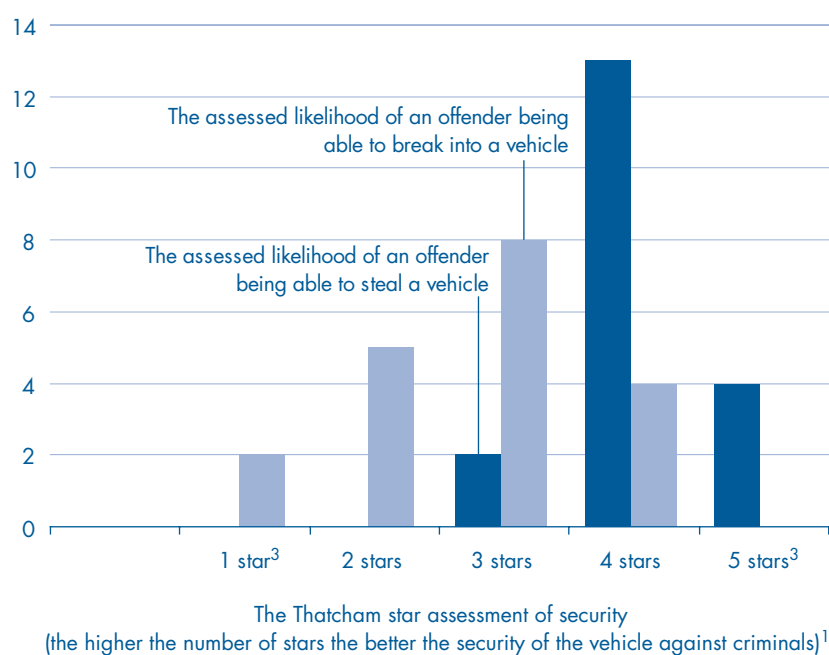
Source: National Audit Office interviews with Vehicle Manufacturers

3.5 Further improvements in vehicle security by manufacturers would reduce the incidence of crime further. Our analysis of the assessed security of the top twenty selling cars in the United Kingdom in 2003-04 shows that

cars remain vulnerable to being broken into and that some makes are more vulnerable to criminals than others (see Figure 13).

13 A summary of the Thatcham vehicle security assessments for the top twenty makes of car sold in the United Kingdom in 2003-04

Number of top twenty car models²



Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from the Thatcham website (www.thatcham.org) and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders

NOTES

1 The security ratings are derived from research and testing by the Motor Insurance Repair Research Centre (Thatcham). There are a number of different specifications available for each model of car which have been assessed by Thatcham. As a consequence, we have used a modal average for each model of vehicle.

2 No assessments were available for the Renault Clio. The other top twenty cars were the Ford Focus, Vauxhall Corsa, Peugeot 206, Vauxhall Astra, Ford Fiesta, Renault Megane, Volkswagen Golf, Ford Mondeo, Peugeot 307, BMW 3 series, Vauxhall Vectra, Ford Ka, Vauxhall Zafira, Nissan Micra, Fiat Punto, Volkswagen Polo, Citroen Zara, Mini, Toyota Yaris.

3 The four models of car scoring 5 stars were the BMW 3 series, Renault Megane, Volkswagen Golf and the Vauxhall Vectra. The two models of car scoring only one star for security against thefts from the vehicle were the Peugeot 206 and the Fiat Punto.

PART FOUR

Police forces and local communities
are becoming better equipped to tackle
vehicle crime



4.1 Our key findings are:

- The Police can find it difficult to engage local organisations to address vehicle crime.
- Police detection rates for thefts of and from vehicles are relatively low.

The Police can find it difficult to engage local organisations to address vehicle crime

4.2 Projects aimed at reducing vehicle crime typically involve addressing environmental and other underlying causes of crime. Reducing vehicle crime in a town, for example, might involve raising awareness amongst residents, improving street lighting and targeting known offenders. As a consequence, the Police must rely on the assistance of other local organisations. **Figure 14** demonstrates how such a co-ordinated approach in Sweden has enabled Gothenburg to achieve considerable reductions in vehicle crime.

4.3 Police Forces can find it difficult to engage local organisations in tackling vehicle crime.

Thirty two per cent of Police Basic Command Units described the level of activity of car park operators towards reducing crime as 'low', whereas a quarter considered their level of activity to be 'high'. Of the 30 car park operators we interviewed, 16 were participating in local area initiatives to reduce vehicle crime, but only one of the 30 motor dealers we interviewed was participating in local thefts of and thefts from vehicles initiatives. Our report on crime reduction highlighted the role of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in bringing local organisations in England and Wales together to combat crime.¹² Whilst 73 per cent of Divisional Commanders thought Partnerships had contributed to the reduction in vehicle crime only 16 per cent thought their Partnerships' work had led to a large reduction.

14 An example of a well designed vehicle crime project in Gothenburg, Sweden

A thefts of and thefts from vehicles initiative in Gunnared, on the outskirts of Gothenburg has reported a 60 per cent reduction in car crime and a 20 per cent reduction in total crime through improving security, making changes to the physical environment and mandatory use of steering wheel locks between 2001 and 2003. The project demonstrates how a co-ordinated approach, based around the four success factors identified by the National Audit Office can lead to significant reductions in crime.¹

- 1 **Rigorous analysis:** The motivation for the project came from a survey of safety in the area, which highlighted local residents' concerns. This was followed up by a crime mapping exercise, identifying hotspots. Since the project started, the crime map has been updated on a weekly basis as a means of evaluation and identifying any developing problems.
- 2 **Targeted at crime reduction:** Reducing car crime was identified as the biggest local concern and the focus of the project. The analysis of hotspots was used to identify where improvements should be made, for example physical restructuring of car parks and improved lighting.
- 3 **The project is of sufficient scale to tackle the problem:** Gunnared is a distinct suburb of Gothenburg with around 9,000 local residents and recognised social problems. The project was undertaken across the whole suburb, which has minimised the risk of displacement. All seven social landlords in the area are involved and have taken a co-ordinated approach, for example, jointly funding a security company to patrol car parks across the suburb.
- 4 **A rational solution to the crime problem:** Prior to designing the project, the manager undertook research into what works in preventing car crime, drawing on best practice from abroad, including work undertaken in England and Wales. Their research identified that whilst it is difficult to steal a car with a steering wheel lock, previous projects trying to persuade owners to use steering wheel locks had failed. The project addressed this through the authority of the landlords, by making the rental of car parking spaces in the area conditional on the use of a steering wheel lock, lent to tenants at no cost.

Source: National Audit Office

NOTE

¹ Further details of the success factors can be found in the National Audit Office report on 'Reducing Crime: the Home Office working with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships' (HC 16, 2004-05).

12 Reducing Crime: the Home Office working with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, HC 16, 2004-05.

Police detection rates for thefts of and from vehicles are relatively low

4.4 The risk of detection can deter someone from committing a crime. The Police detection rates (which refers to the proportion of offences that result in an offender being fined, cautioned, charged, summoned, or no further action being taken) for thefts of and from vehicles are relatively low. Only six per cent of thefts from vehicles and 13 per cent of thefts of vehicles were resolved in 2003-04, compared to an average of 23 per cent for all crimes recorded by the Police. The detection rates for thefts of and from vehicles have remained fairly constant over the last four years, despite the reported decrease in the number of offences committed.

4.5 The detection rates for thefts of and from vehicles varied between Basic Command Units in 2003-04. Our analysis of Home Office data for 266 Basic Command Units where figures were available, indicates detection rates are higher in areas with low levels of crime. Detection rates for thefts of and thefts from vehicles are dependent on a range of factors, including the police resources available and the competing priority of other types of offence. The introduction of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system demonstrates, however, that different approaches adopted by some forces are likely to contribute to the variations.

4.6 The Automatic Number Plate Recognition system is a relatively new approach to tackling vehicle crime - the Home Office spent £4.7 million in 2003-04 on a pilot to provide 23 Police forces with Automatic Number Plate Recognition equipment. The technology works by processing images of vehicle number plates captured by video cameras and checking them against a database of vehicle numbers of interest to the police. Number plates which match the database generate an alert which the Police can then respond to by pulling over the motorist. The database used by the Police comprises local intelligence information, data from the Police National Computer (which includes records of some 500,000 lost or stolen vehicles) and data from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

4.7 The results of the pilot suggest the technology has been successful. Over a 13 month period from 1 June 2003 to 30 June 2004, the equipment read approximately 28 million number plates and identified 1.1 million (3.9 per cent) vehicles of interest to the Police. Police intercept teams stopped 101,775 of these vehicles (9.2 per cent of the vehicles of interest). The team also stopped a further 78,768 vehicles after observation - typically because the vehicles looked suspicious or the

driver was driving erratically, the Vehicle Excise Duty was out of date or because occupants were not wearing a seatbelt. As a result of the Police stops, 13,499 people were arrested, of which 3,324 were for driving offences and 1,386 were arrested for the theft of or from vehicles.

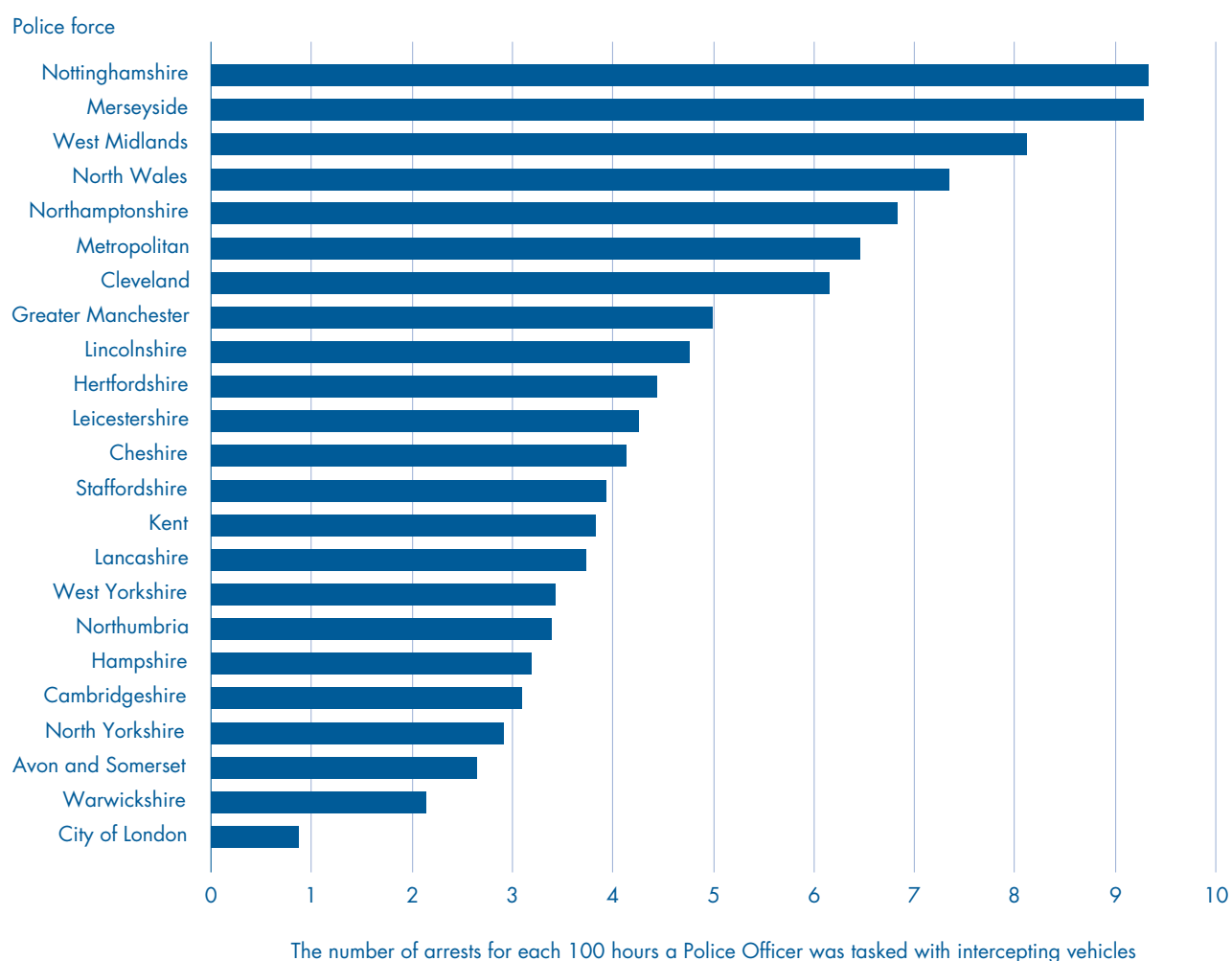
4.8 The evaluation of the 13 month pilot, by PA Consulting Group, found numbers of arrests made by a Police Officer for every 100 hours they were tasked with intercepting vehicles varied considerably (see Figure 15). The arrests covered all types of offence (not just vehicle crime) but nevertheless provide an indication of how successful each Police Force had been in making it more difficult for offenders to benefit from their crimes. The range in arrest rates was due to a number of factors, including: variations in the numbers of Police Officers involved in intercepting vehicles identified; differences in the amount of time spent travelling to the targeted area (staff travelling time varied from 40 per cent of time in Lincolnshire, to 17 per cent of time in Cleveland); and, differences in how potential areas for deploying the equipment were identified. There are also likely to be some variations across the country in the proportion of vehicles that would trigger action from the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system.

4.9 Improvements in thefts of and thefts from vehicles detection rates depend upon determining what works well and disseminating good practices; such as how to use the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system effectively. In June 2003, the Police Standards Unit compiled a CD-Rom of guidance for tackling vehicle crime in conjunction with the Association of Chief Police Officers. The guidance includes a menu of actions Police units can use to tackle offenders and help make potential victims and locations more secure, based on existing good practice guidance and examples from around 20 current projects.

4.10 The guidance from the Police Standards Unit is a useful source of information to Basic Command Units tackling vehicle crime. Around half of the projects featured have been reviewed. Although the guidance contained a wealth of information, a more structured approach may make it more user-friendly. In response to our survey, 63 per cent of Police Commanders rated guidance from the Police Standards Unit as useful, although 28 per cent said that it was not useful and the remainder didn't know. The Unit could adopt a 'problem orientated policing' approach by structuring the guidance more clearly around the key questions we developed:

- **What is the profile of vehicle crime in the area?** The Unit should compile intelligence information from a range of sources, including Police records, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and through discussions

15 There was a large variation in the performance of teams operating the Automatic Number Plate Recognition system



Source: National Audit Office analysis of data from PA Consulting Group

NOTES

Each bar shows the number of arrests made by the Police Force divided by the number of Police Officer hours involved. The proportion was then multiplied by 100 to show the arrest rate per 100 hours.

23 Police Forces took part in the pilot.

with car park operators, retailers and neighbourhood watch associations to build an accurate picture of vehicle crime in the area.

- **What actions would be most effective to tackle problem locations, victims, and offenders?** Examples from other areas that have successfully addressed similar problems could be useful.
- **How should available resources be prioritised to achieve the biggest impact on vehicle crime?** Decisions need to be based on an analysis of the most significant problems and an estimate of the resources involved in undertaking potential initiatives. Commanders may want to consider whether tackling vehicle crime could be a route into solving other types of crime.
- **Can local partner agencies help me with delivering initiatives?** The intelligence information already collected can be used to demonstrate to local organisations that it is in their interest to assist.
- **How will I monitor the impact of the initiatives undertaken?** Tactics should be continually reviewed to ensure they remain effective.

PART FIVE

Progress in improving the security of car parks has been more limited



5.1 A thief might be deterred from attempting to steal a vehicle or its contents if there is a chance they could be observed during the crime. Our key findings are:

- Closed Circuit Television Cameras have reduced vehicle crime, although performance varies.
- Many car park operators remain sceptical of whether the benefits of improved security outweigh the costs.

Closed Circuit Television Cameras have reduced vehicle crime, although performance varies

5.2 The installation of cameras can reassure the public and reduce their fear of becoming a victim of crime. Between 1999-2000 and 2002-03 the Home Office spent £106 million on closed circuit television camera schemes in 1,222 car parks. In addition, private car park operators have installed their own cameras: 21 of the 30 car park operators we interviewed had installed Closed Circuit Television in their car parks since 1999.

5.3 Cameras are likely to have led to a reduction in vehicle crime. Research evaluations (see Appendix 2) indicate that the use of cameras can lead to a 41 per cent reduction in crimes committed in car parks, although the extent of the reduction does vary, partly because in some cases the evaluations had not been properly defined. However, one forthcoming Home Office CCTV evaluation shows reductions in some car parks can exceed this.¹³ The installation of 646 cameras in 60 London Underground car parks in 2002, for example, contributed to increased Police detection rates and a 45 per cent reduction in vehicle crimes recorded by the British Transport Police in 2003.¹⁴ Six of the car park operators we interviewed considered the installation of cameras to have been their most successful initiative in reducing crime, but three thought it had been the least successful. Closed Circuit Television Cameras appear to be more successful when installed alongside other complementary measures, such as improved lighting and fencing or a more visible staff presence.

¹³ Gill M, Spriggs A, Allen J, Argomaniz J, Bryan J, Jessiman P, Kara D, Kilworth J, Little R, Swain D and Waples S (forthcoming): The Impact of CCTV: Fourteen Case Studies, Home Office Online Report, London: Home Office.

¹⁴ Assessing the Impact of CCTV – The Hawkeye Case Study, Home Office, January 2005.

Many car park operators believe improved security is only part of the answer to making car parks safer

5.4 The Home Office has contributed £965,000 since 2001 towards the Safer Parking Scheme and its predecessor the ACPO Secured Car Park Scheme. The Safer Parking Scheme is owned by the Association of Chief Police Officers and managed by the British Parking Association to reduce crime and the fear of crime in parking facilities. Parking facilities that pass a Police assessment are awarded a Park MarkTM. The award signifies that the parking operator has put in place measures that help to deter criminal activity and anti-social behaviour.

5.5 The Safer Parking scheme is based on an earlier initiative, the ACPO Secured Car Park Scheme that was evaluated by the Home Office.¹⁵ The evaluation found that the scheme had led to reductions in crime, but the scheme was not widespread and many of the car parks involved already had low levels of crime. The revised Safer Parking scheme has sought to reduce the administrative burden on car park operators and to be more flexible than its predecessor without compromising its effectiveness in reducing crime. It begins with an assessment of the level of crime experienced in a car park and permits a greater range of options for car park operators to achieve a Park MarkTM award. The Association of Chief Police Officers and the Home Office consider the revised scheme to be accessible by all responsible operators.

5.6 The ACPO Secured Car Parks Joint Steering Group, which included Home Office representatives as well as Police and industry representatives, set a target to have 2,000 car parks in the Secured Car Park Scheme by March 2000. The target was referred to in the strategy developed by the Vehicle Crime Reduction Action Team. But only 1,350 operators belonged to the scheme by March 2004. Two of the car park operators we interviewed confirmed that all their car parks had received awards,

whereas 16 said none of their car parks belonged to the scheme. The main reasons why operators we interviewed did not belong to the scheme were because they did not know about it or because they considered it too expensive to justify the structural changes required. The reluctance to participate in the scheme was partly because operators did not think customers regard security as very important: the operators we interviewed considered the location of the car park, convenience and price had the biggest impact on demand for car parking and only two operators thought security was a key factor.

5.7 Sixteen of the 30 car park operators we interviewed confirmed that they were participating in local initiatives to tackle vehicle crime. Yet take-up of the Secured Car Park Scheme was particularly low in some parts of the country. Our analysis of data found that whilst South East England (Greater London, Surrey and Kent) accounted for over 20 per cent of car parks in the scheme, East Yorkshire, Humberside, Lincolnshire, Gloucestershire and Cornwall each had fewer than 10 secure car parks available. Across England and Wales there were only 132 secure car parks available in hospitals and just 125 at railway stations. Nine counties did not have any hospital or railway car parks in the scheme.¹⁶

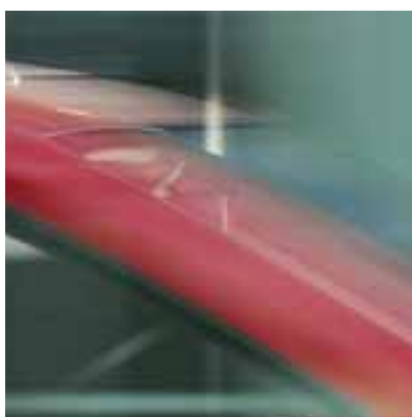
5.8 The introduction of the Safer Parking Scheme in October 2004 has led to an increase in numbers and the Scheme plan to undertake a publicity campaign in Summer 2005 to raise awareness further. The Head of the Scheme reported that there were 1,633 Award holders by December 2004 of which 1,527 were in England and Wales. A further 163 parking facilities were awaiting approval or had expressed an interest in applying for the Award. The Scheme organisers confirmed that all of the major national car park operators, and most train operators, either belonged or were seeking to belong to the scheme. The Home Office has confirmed it will review, in April 2005, the progress made by car park operators in reducing crime and all options, including legislative change, will be considered.

¹⁵ *Between the Lines: an evaluation of the 'Secured Car Park Award'*, Home Office study 266.

¹⁶ East Yorkshire (including Hull and Kingston on Hull), Gloucestershire, Humberside, Cornwall, Shropshire, Worcestershire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Tyne and Wear.

PART SIX

Data held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency are crucial and need to be accurate



A significant minority of vehicle records are inaccurate

6.1 Police initiatives to tackle vehicle crime rely, in part, on the database of vehicles and registered keepers maintained by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. Police officers can check the registered keeper of a vehicle against the database before confirming details with a motorist they have stopped.

6.2 Inaccuracies in the databases of drivers and vehicles can undermine the effectiveness of Police initiatives to tackle vehicle crime. Maintaining a fully up to date database of vehicle records is difficult: people do not always notify the Agency straight away, for example, when they move house. The Agency estimates that there are probably 950,000 vehicles on the road in the United Kingdom for which they do not have up to date data and which have been unlicensed for more than three months.

6.3 The Agency's database also contains some inaccuracies for those vehicle records it holds. In most cases the inaccuracies do not prevent the Police and other enforcement agencies from tracing or confirming the registered keeper. A survey commissioned by the Agency in 2003 established that in approximately 90 per cent

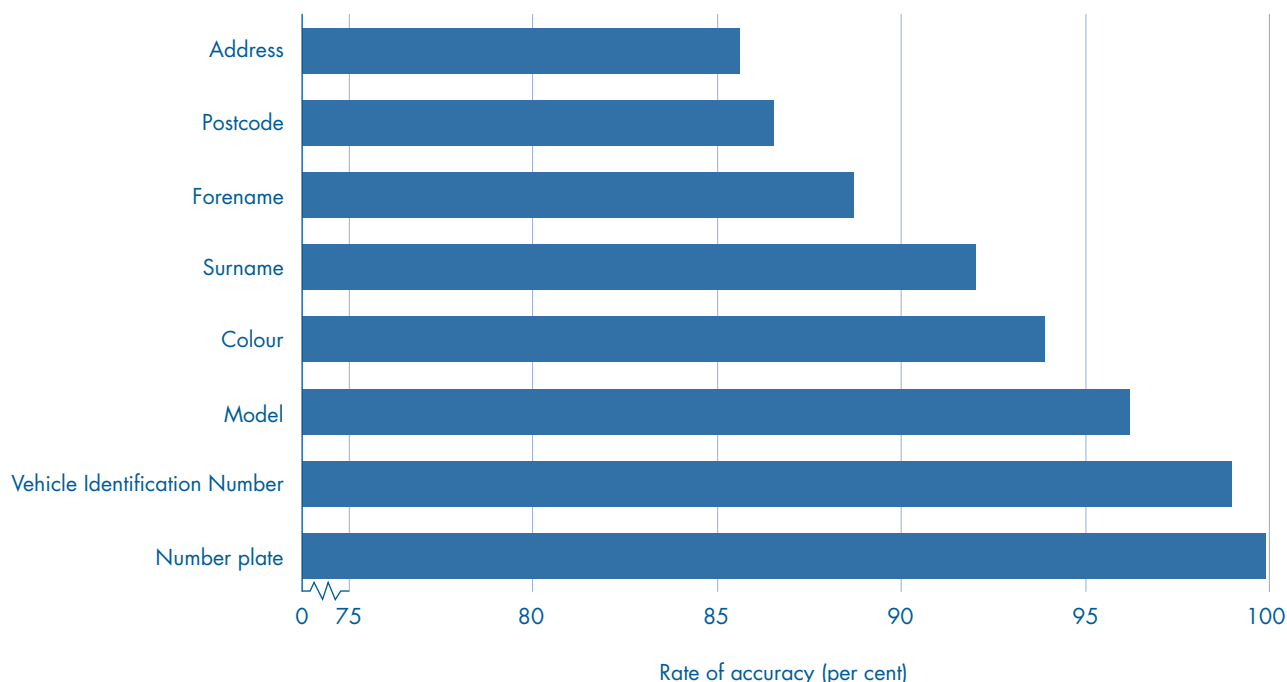
of vehicle records and 82 per cent of driving licences the information was sufficiently accurate to enable the Police to trace the keeper. However, there continue to be a large number of minor errors. The National Audit Office reported in 1993 that around 35 per cent of drivers' records and 25 per cent of vehicle records contained at least one error, although a number of these were of a relatively minor nature.¹⁷ The Agency confirmed at the subsequent Committee of Public Accounts hearing that the records 'were not accurate enough for future uses to which they would be put in a more automated era ...' such as the use of speed cameras.¹⁸ A further survey of 8,999 drivers and 7,952 vehicle keepers in 2003 by the Operational Research Unit of the Department for Transport estimated the accuracy of driver records to be between 66 per cent and 74 per cent. Eight per cent of records had one error, two per cent had two errors and 21 per cent of records had three or more errors. The main mistakes were with the address and postcode – often because the driver had moved house. For vehicle records, the level of accuracy was estimated to be around 68 per cent plus or minus 3 per cent. Nearly 17 per cent of vehicle records had one error, seven per cent had two errors, and eight per cent had three or more mistakes. **Figure 16 overleaf** shows the estimated rate of accuracy for each section of the vehicle record.

¹⁷ National Audit Office, 'The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency: Quality of Service to Customers', December 1993.

¹⁸ Committee of Public Accounts, 34th report 1993-94.

16 The estimated rate of accuracy of each section of the vehicle records held by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Section of the vehicle record



Source: Operational Research Unit, Department for Transport

The Agency has set a target to halve the estimated number of unregistered vehicles by 2007 and instigated several initiatives to improve data accuracy

6.4 The Agency has set a target to halve the estimated 950,000 unregistered vehicles by 2007 and has instigated three key initiatives to improve data accuracy:

- Continuous registration to keep up to date with changes in ownership.
- Establishing a computer link with the insurance industry to identify vehicles written off.
- A data cleansing exercise to improve reliability.

6.5 Since January 2004, revised car tax rules mean that the registered keeper of a vehicle remains responsible for taxing a vehicle, or making a Statutory Off-Road Notification (SORN declaration) until that liability is formally transferred to a new keeper. The onus is on the keeper to inform the Agency of a change in ownership and failure to comply can result in an automatic penalty of £80, reduced to £40 if paid within 28 days. The Agency has reported that in the first year of operation, the revised procedures have led to a three-fold increase in the number of vehicle keepers that have notified the Agency that their vehicle is being kept off the road. There has been a 20 per cent increase in notifications of vehicle disposals and a 12 per cent increase in notification of other changes. According to Department for Transport statistics, the introduction of continuous registration has contributed to a reduction in Vehicle Excise Duty evasion from 4.8 per cent of total revenue in 2002-03 to 3.4 per cent in 2003-04. The decrease in evasion is equivalent to an extra £77 million in revenue.

6.6 The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, in conjunction with the motor insurance industry and Police, has established a computer link with the Motor Insurance Anti-Fraud and Theft Register to collect daily updates of vehicles damaged beyond repair. The link enables the Agency to obtain details of written-off vehicles and to put a marker on the relevant record in its database. The marker is part of a Vehicle Identity Check scheme which means that if someone subsequently seeks to register a vehicle with those details the Agency will refer the person to the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency so the vehicle can be checked.

6.7 The computer link went live in April 2003 and in its first nine months the Agency received details for nearly 170,000 cars. The Department for Transport and the Agency recognised that there were likely to be some teething problems with the data, but considered the merits of introducing the scheme as soon as possible outweighed the problems in getting fully comprehensive data. Nevertheless, the Agency erred on the side of caution by only putting a marker on those vehicles where there was definitive evidence that they had been written-off. As a consequence, the Agency estimates that details of around 30 per cent of written-off cars were not captured in the scheme's first year of operation, mainly because any notifications that contained 'keying in' errors in the vehicle registration mark or the 17 digit Vehicle Identification Number were rejected. The computer link was upgraded in August 2004 and as insurers have moved across the earlier version was turned off at the end of 2004. The revised system enables the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency to send back information to the originating insurer each time a record is rejected so it can be checked and corrected.

6.8 The Agency has also established an Accuracy Co-ordination Group to improve the accuracy of existing records. The Group's action plan relies on the new regime of continuous registration to make a significant contribution to improvements in accuracy: in particular to update those vehicles that have been sold or where the owner has changed address. It also plans to undertake a full address cleansing exercise by using software to check the validity of the postcode versus the address. The Agency reports it is mid-way through a 12 month programme to issue a new harmonised vehicle registration certificate to registered keepers when they re-license their vehicle and that it has agreed a target with the Department for Transport that 97.5 per cent of these new certificates will be up to date. The Agency anticipates this project will enable it to isolate those vehicles on its database that have already been scrapped. The introduction of bar codes on all Agency forms has also helped to minimise the risk of errors arising from the manual input of information as well as ensuring that licensing information supplied, for example, to Police Automatic Number Plate Recognition systems is much more up to date.

6.9 The Agency has developed a number of longer term initiatives to improve performance. The Agency has established a Development Centre Management Team with their own bespoke offices in order to address such business issues, develop suitable initiatives and implement projects to improve performance. The Agency has enabled the Police and local authorities to wheel-clamp unlicensed vehicles as agents of the Secretary of State for Transport. The Department for Transport confirmed that, as at December 2004, 55 local authorities and three Police forces were using these powers.

PART SEVEN

Further progress is needed in targeting offenders



7.1 The Home Office has sought to target prolific offenders, which includes those who are likely to commit vehicle crime, in order to reduce numbers of offences. Our key findings are:

- Although the Home Office has introduced measures to make it more difficult for criminals to sell stolen vehicles or parts, progress has been limited.
- The Home Office has worked with the Police to develop a range of initiatives to target offenders and has also introduced a prolific and other priority offenders strategy in September 2004.

Although the Home Office has introduced measures to make it more difficult for criminals to sell stolen vehicles or parts, progress has been limited

7.2 Persistent and organised criminals have sought to benefit from vehicle crime by selling stolen vehicles or parts to the public. The British Crime Survey estimates that around 53 per cent of cars and light vans stolen in 2002-03 were recovered. The remaining 47 per cent were not recovered and the Home Office take this as an approximate measure of the extent of organised vehicle crime with the vehicles being re-sold under different identities, stripped for parts or exported.

7.3 Responsibility for tackling organised gangs involved in thefts of and thefts from vehicles rests, as with other types of crime, with Police forces. Since 2000, however, the Home Office and the National Criminal Intelligence Service have spent over £1 million largely on three projects to support efforts to tackle 'ringing' (re-registering a stolen vehicle to give it the identity of a vehicle which has been "written-off" by an insurance company or scrapped by its previous owner) and 'cloning' (giving a stolen vehicle the identity of a similar vehicle on the road that has not been stolen by changing its number plates and in some cases re-registering it), motorbike theft and the export of stolen cars. The projects involved the National Criminal Intelligence Service identifying and specifying data it required from the Police and elsewhere and then analysing the information collected in order to produce actionable intelligence reports. A Home Office evaluation

of the projects found that between January 2001 and December 2002 the projects had led to 19 people being arrested and charged, 550 vehicles recovered and an estimated 713 vehicle thefts prevented.¹⁹ Taking account of Police overtime costs, the evaluation concluded that the most resource intensive operation (to tackle the theft and export of cars and vans to West Africa) involving 20,000 hours of Police time had been cost effective, costing just 23 pence for each £1 saved. By comparison, the 779 days of Police time used on the project to tackle the 'ringing' and 'cloning' of mass market cars was estimated to have cost £7.56 for every £1 saved, although these figures do not take account of the value of law enforcement activity in re-assuring the public that actions are being taken against organised vehicle criminals. The review found that the projects could have been more successful if the Police had given a higher priority to organised vehicle crime by providing more timely information to the National Criminal Intelligence Service and acting more promptly on the intelligence reports received. Similarly, the review reported some Police reservations and the National Criminal Intelligence Service confirmed that changes were made in 2002 and afterwards with the aim of assessing the scale and nature of organised vehicle crime, better identifying the most serious organised criminals and producing timely intelligence reports that the Police could act on. These changes included more support for live Police operations by using the specialist vehicle crime knowledge and analytical capabilities available in the National Criminal Intelligence Service.

7.4 The Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 requires all number plate suppliers in England and Wales to register with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. Registered suppliers are obliged to check the validity of each request for a number plate by examining records of vehicle ownership. The Police can use the database to inspect premises and records of all number plates supplied. The Agency maintains a database of over 30,000 registered businesses. The regulations (which came into force in March 2003) do not, however, apply to businesses in Scotland and Northern Ireland. As a consequence, there is a risk that criminals can continue to obtain false number plates from these unregulated markets, in particular by using mail order or internet services. The Department for Transport confirmed the Road Safety Bill contains powers to extend the register to Scotland and Northern Ireland.

19 Brown R, Clarke R, Rix B and Sheptycki J, *Tackling Organised Vehicle Crime: the role of NCIS*, Home Office 238, 2004.

7.5 The Home Office has also introduced statutory regulation of the 3,000 motor salvage operators it estimates exist in England and Wales. As the vehicle crime strategy acknowledges, some salvage operators work to high standards and comply fully with the law. But for the unscrupulous, the salvage industry can provide a means to dispose of motor vehicles – either by replacing their true identity with that of a legitimate vehicle that has been written off ('vehicle ringing') or by breaking the vehicle up for parts. The Home Office introduced the Motor Salvage Operators Regulations (using powers provided in the Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001), which came into force in October 2002 and require every local authority to establish a register of motor salvage operators so the Police could inspect registered premises and take action against motor salvage operators who were trading whilst unregistered. Registration requires an operator to maintain appropriate records of purchase and disposals, and to allow the Police the right of entry to premises and the right of search without a warrant. The British Vehicle Salvage Federation confirmed it welcomes the regulations and has encouraged its members to provide their full support in every respect.

7.6 In practice, however, the regulations have not been fully implemented and enforced. The Home Office recognised that implementation was key and commissioned MORI to undertake a survey to measure progress. The survey of the 200 local authorities with the highest vehicle crime rates was conducted between January and April 2004 and

established that 26 per cent had not yet set up a register. Forty two per cent of the authorities with a register had not received any applications from local motor salvage operators. Local authorities identified a number of reasons why they had found it difficult to meet their obligations to register motor salvage operators. **Figure 17** outlines some of the common barriers. The Home Office confirmed it has written to its Regional Directors to ask them to press local authorities to fulfil their obligations. The Home Office has also developed guidance for Police, local authorities and the motor salvage industry on the regulations which is available on its website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk).

7.7 The introduction of the Vehicle Identity Check scheme in April 2003 (see paragraph 6.6) is intended to deter criminals from 'ringing' a car by making it more difficult for stolen cars to assume the identity of vehicles that have been written-off and scrapped. The check concentrates on verifying that an accident-damaged vehicle that had been written-off and has subsequently been repaired matches the registered particulars on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency database. The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency examiners corroborate identity, so far as it is possible, by checking the Vehicle Identity Number plates are 'originals' rather than substitutes, that the plates have not been tampered with, and that there is clear evidence the vehicle has been repaired to remedy the damage identified in the insurer's report.

17 Barriers to effective compliance with the motor salvage industry regulations

Perceived Barrier

- A lack of time and resources

Comments

'I don't think it's a problem with the system. It's simply one of those things I'm aware I have to do – it's just finding the time to do it.'

- Lack of awareness of the regulations by local authorities and who is responsible for them

'We had an internal debate about where the responsibility should lie, the department, which function and it bounced between our licensing department and environmental health.'

- Difficulties in identifying motor salvage operators

'Well what we've done is we went through the Yellow Pages, we also looked at the existing scrap metal yards that we had registered and we sent letters out...'

'The police were going to inform us of the motor salvage operators that may be operating in our area and we were going to be given that information ... until we've got that, it's sort of a dead file really.'

- Difficulties in working with the police

'Well, it almost seems as if the police were unsure themselves and have not been able to help us.'

'We sent stuff [to the police] but we don't get comments back. Or certainly they haven't looked at the register.'

Source: NAO summary of the MORI survey of Local Authorities commissioned by the Home Office, June 2004

7.8 A post implementation review by the Department for Transport in June 2004 indicates the Vehicle Identity Check scheme has contributed to a reduction in the number of stolen cars which have not been subsequently recovered. As the scheme acts as a deterrent to criminals using the identity of salvaged vehicles to sell on stolen vehicles, it is difficult to obtain clear evidence on the extent to which car ‘ringing’ has reduced. However, Department for Transport analysis of British Crime Survey estimates shows that thefts of vehicles reduced from 278,000 in the British Crime Survey 2002-03 before the Vehicle Identity Check scheme was implemented in April 2003 to 241,000 in British Crime Survey 2003-04 (a reduction of 13 per cent).²⁰ The Department for Transport regard the scheme as very successful, although the British Vehicle Salvage Federation has questioned the merits of the initiative. The Association of Chief Police Officers has also confirmed that it believes the scheme is likely to have a significant impact on vehicle crime.

7.9 The innovative nature of the Vehicle Identity Check scheme and its likely deterrent effect meant it was difficult to estimate numbers of vehicles requiring inspection. The Department for Transport had originally estimated that 180,000 cars would be put through the Vehicle Identity Check in Great Britain and 3,000 a year in Northern Ireland. In practice, the estimates proved to be wrong; only 26,700 cars were examined between April 2003 and March 2004. One reason for the low volumes appears to be that the scheme is deterring people from repairing and re-licensing written-off vehicles. The British Vehicle Salvage Federation has questioned the cost effectiveness of the scheme and believes the reduction in the number of vehicles being legitimately repaired and put back on the road has affected the profitability of the salvage industry.

7.10 The lower than expected numbers of vehicles requiring examination meant the scheme operated at a deficit of £2.6 million in 2003-04. The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency and the Department for Transport confirmed they were concerned about the extent of the deficit and have put in place actions to overcome the problem. The Agency had recruited sufficient staff to deal with 180,000 cars a year. The Agency is now rationalising its number of inspection sites and reducing staff numbers from 77 to 37 to meet expected volumes of 45,000 vehicles a year by April 2005. The Department for Transport has also increased the fee from £26.50 to £35 per car from October 2004. Whilst it is important to eliminate any further operating deficit, the Department for Transport believes the benefits of reducing the extent of car ‘ringing’ clearly outweigh its costs.

The Home Office has worked with the Police to develop a range of initiatives to target offenders and has also introduced a prolific and other priority offenders strategy

7.11 The motor industry thought the Home Office could do more to address the ‘root’ causes of vehicle crime by tackling the perpetrators. However, Police activity is, to some extent, already based on intelligence led prioritisation that would have also targeted prolific vehicle crime offenders. The Home Office reported that it had worked with Partnerships and the Police to develop activities to target offenders. The activities included the development of a National Intelligence Model to provide intelligence information, and the setting up of the National DNA Database and the National Automated Fingerprint Identification System to assist the police in detecting offenders.

²⁰ The British Crime Survey is a household survey of people’s experience of crime and it defines “vehicle” as a car, van, motorcycle, scooter, or moped which is either owned or regularly used by anyone in the household.

7.12 Improvements in vehicle security could have led offenders to find alternative ways of stealing vehicles – the Police Officers we interviewed confirmed that although numbers are relatively small, offenders are increasingly confronting motorists or burgling houses in order to steal car or motor cycle keys. Home Office analysis of 4,515 thefts of vehicles registered between 1998 and 2001, where the method of theft was known, in Greater Manchester and Northumbria found criminals had used keys to steal the car in 3,847 cases (85 per cent). The most common method of stealing the keys was by burglary (37 per cent) or because the owner had left the keys in the vehicle (18 per cent). Robbery, including cases of ‘car-jacking’, occurred in four per cent of cases. However, the Car Theft Index 2004 shows that the number of new and nearly new cars (aged 0 to 3 years) stolen in 2003 has reduced compared to increases seen in 2002 and 2001. There are no comprehensive national statistics on the number of cases where criminals have used robbery or burglary to take vehicle keys, however, as Police recording standards do not separately identify the theft of car keys. This type of crime could be recorded as burglary, attempted vehicle theft or robbery by Police forces. The Home Office consider technological improvements, such as the Thatcham Category 5 Criteria for After Theft Vehicle Recovery Systems offers the greatest potential for tackling this type of crime.

7.13 The Home Office has drawn upon the different activities and initiatives it has run with the Police and Partnerships to tackle offenders when it developed the prolific and other priority offenders strategy. The Home Office’s prolific offenders and other priority offenders strategy, launched in September 2004, aims to encourage a more co-ordinated approach focussed on the 5,000 to 7,500 offenders thought to be responsible for nearly 1 in 10 crimes. The strategy is composed of three strands: prevent and deter, catch and convict, and rehabilitate and resettle. The Home Office has asked Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to take responsibility for the ownership and implementation of local programmes. The Department assured us that prolific offender schemes had been set up in all areas and went operational in September 2004 to cover the catch and convict and rehabilitate and resettle strands. Partnerships were asked to develop action plans on the prevent and deter strand so the whole strategy could be implemented by February 2005.

PART EIGHT

The Home Office has committed considerable resources to raising public awareness



The Home Office has made good progress in running a publicity campaign which has contributed to the reduction in vehicle crime

8.1 Motorists and vehicle owners can reduce the risk of their vehicle being stolen by keeping it secure and not leaving valuables and property in view. The Home Office spent £26 million between 2000-01 and 2003-04 on a publicity campaign to warn motorists about vehicle crime through a combination of television, radio, poster, newspaper, internet and ambient advertising (such as messages on petrol pumps and on parking tickets). The media campaign, which featured slogans such as 'Lock it or lose it', 'Crime: Let's bring it down' and 'Park your stuff out of sight' sought to raise public awareness of the risks of vehicle crime and what motorists could do to protect their property. The campaign ran eight times over the four year period.

8.2 The public awareness campaign has included:

- **Targeted leaflets.** One hundred and five local authorities (of which the Home Office reported that 70 were in the highest crime quartile) are participating in an initiative whereby parking attendants notify the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency of those cars where motorists have left items on display. Some 20,000 leaflets have been sent out by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.
- **Crime prevention leaflets.** The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency sent out leaflets with car tax reminders. The Agency reported over 54 million leaflets were despatched between September 2003 and November 2004.
- **Advice on the internet.** Information is available on the website www.crimereduction.gov.uk to encourage voluntary and community groups to disseminate car crime prevention advice to its members. The website www.secureyourmotor.gov.uk also provides practical advice to the public.

- **Exhibition stands.** The Home Office reported that the Vehicle Crime Reduction Roadshow visited 10 shopping centres in each Government Office region and was supported by commercial partners and police forces. The Department reported it had also provided exhibition stands to all Police forces in 2003 for them to use in their communities, which included vehicle crime prevention messages.
- **Campaign partners.** During the course of the national campaign the Home Office recruited over 20 commercial partners who undertook their own activity to promote vehicle crime reduction messages to their own customers and staff. The Home Office calculate the value of this activity at over £4 million.

8.3 The Home Office commissioned Holmes and Cook and TNS Consumer to evaluate the impact of its national advertising campaign. Interviews with selected members of the public in the weeks after each stage of the campaign found that the percentage of respondents who showed spontaneous awareness of any advertising related to thefts of and thefts from vehicles had increased from 24 per cent to 46 per cent and around 93 per cent of car drivers could remember the main messages. Comparing recorded levels of vehicle crime in areas where the adverts were shown with areas where they were not shown indicated a reduction in both thefts of and thefts from vehicles of two to three per cent and one to two per cent respectively per hundred television ratings bought (a television rating is a unit expressing the size of the audience watching that specific advert).

Locally-run publicity campaigns organised in conjunction with other initiatives have also been effective

8.4 Public awareness campaigns can also be effective if they are run locally in conjunction with other initiatives. A report by Nacro on vehicle crime shows how communication can be effective when it is tailored to the specific local situation.²¹ However, there are difficulties in assessing the impact of local publicity campaigns in one area with similar areas that had not used such campaigns, as well as isolating the effect of the national campaign, which meant we could not determine whether local media publicity is more effective than a national campaign. But we examined one scheme which demonstrated how combined local publicity and police operations can be effective.

Figure 18 shows how Police in Portsmouth used a range of different methods of raising public awareness in a targeted way and in conjunction with other initiatives to achieve a 29 per cent reduction in vehicle crime between 2002-03 and 2003-04. It is unclear, however, how much of each particular initiative contributed to the total reduction.

18 Operation Cobra: A co-ordinated approach to reducing vehicle crime in Portsmouth

The initiative, led by the Police is focused on hotspot streets and car parks, vehicles that are most at risk, seasonal events attracting vehicle crime and persistent offenders. Local partner organisations have collaborated:

Portsmouth City Council Parking Department have cut down bushes to improve visibility and erected warning notices in high crime car parks. They have put signs on 247 of their parking meters and introduced some talking meters, which give a spoken warning in hotspot locations.

Local businesses security mark vehicle products at the point of sale and offer discounts on security products.

Residents associations have raised awareness of the vehicle crime hotspots and taken part in property marking events.

Second hand shops scan all property received for ultra violet markings.

Portsmouth hoteliers have put postcards giving vehicle crime advice in hotel rooms.

Special constables cycled around the Southsea Show distributing crime prevention advice.

The local newspaper has run a campaign naming and shaming vehicle crime offenders and raising the profile of the operation.

Source: NAO analysis of information from Hampshire Police

²¹ Nacro, A balanced approach to reducing vehicle crime and disorder, 2001.

APPENDIX 1

The number of thefts of and from vehicles per 1,000 population in 2003-04, by Police Force

Police Force area	Thefts of and from vehicles per 1,000 population in 2003-04	Rating	Police Force area	Thefts of and from vehicles per 1,000 population in 2003-04	Rating
Nottinghamshire	28	red	Staffordshire	13	amber
West Yorkshire	27	red	Northumbria	13	amber
Humberside	25	red	Cheshire	13	amber
Greater Manchester	24	red	Essex	13	amber
Cleveland	23	red	North Yorkshire	13	amber
South Yorkshire	23	red	Sussex	13	amber
South Wales	23	red	Dorset	12	amber
West Midlands	22	red	Kent	12	amber
Metropolitan & City of London	22	red	Durham	12	amber
Northamptonshire	20	red	Lancashire	12	amber
Avon & Somerset	19	amber	Hampshire	12	amber
Merseyside	19	amber	North Wales	11	amber
Bedfordshire	18	amber	Norfolk	10	green
Thames Valley	17	amber	Devon & Cornwall	10	green
Gwent	16	amber	West Mercia	10	green
Hertfordshire	16	amber	Lincolnshire	10	green
Leicestershire	15	amber	Surrey	9	green
Derbyshire	15	amber	Wiltshire	9	green
Cambridgeshire	15	amber	Suffolk	9	green
Gloucestershire	15	amber	Cumbria	8	green
Warwickshire	14	amber	Dyfed-Powys	5	green

NOTE

We used an interquartile range to identify those Forces with the highest vehicle crime rate (marked red), and those with the lowest rate (marked green).

APPENDIX 2

Our audit approach

Survey of the motor industry

1 We commissioned MORI Social Research Institute to seek the views of motor manufacturers, vehicle insurers, car park operators and motor dealers. MORI used a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods: senior officials in ten motor manufacturing companies and ten vehicle insurers were interviewed in depth for up to 45 minutes for their views on vehicle crime; the interviews with 30 motor dealers and 30 car park operators were shorter and more tightly structured. We provided MORI with a list of companies to contact and agreed to keep details confidential so interviewees could discuss issues without the risk their competitors could gain a commercial advantage from the information provided.

Census of Chairs of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and Police Divisional Commanders

2 We undertook a questionnaire survey of all 376 Chairs of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and all Divisional Commanders of Police Basic Command Units. The two questionnaires were similar, covering:

- The role of the Home Office.
- Local strategies and targets.
- Partnership activity.
- Staffing and resources.
- Evaluation of crime reduction projects.

The response rates were high. Two hundred and forty nine Divisional Police Commanders responded and we received 232 questionnaires from Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, equivalent to a 62 per cent response rate. We compared those Partnerships that had replied with data on crime rates and determined that we had received a broadly representative mix of responses.

Views of offenders and residents

3 We commissioned MORI Social Research Institute to run four focus groups with persistent offenders and with local residents. Two groups (one of persistent offenders and the other of local residents) were held in the London Borough of Hackney and two (one of persistent offenders and the other of local residents) in Chesterfield, Derbyshire. The Probation Service assisted with identifying offenders in each area. Topics explored with the offenders were: their motivation for committing crime, experience of interventions, their future aspirations and ideas about what would deter them from re-offending. Issues explored with the residents included their perceptions of crime in the area, their awareness and opinion of current crime reduction initiatives and ideas about how to achieve reductions in crime.

Review of existing research on methods of crime reduction

4 We commissioned Professor Per-Olof Wikstrom of the Institute of Criminology, University of Cambridge to undertake a literature review of existing research on vehicle crime reduction initiatives. A copy of his report is available from the National Audit Office website (www.nao.org.uk).

Analytical review of crime statistics

5 We interviewed key staff at the Home Office and analysed existing crime data. Crime data included published crime statistics and Police recorded crime data collated by the Police Standards Unit.

Seeking the views of interested parties

6 In designing and carrying out the study, we consulted with the Home Office, the Association of Chief Police Officers, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the Department for Transport and its agencies. We sought the views of a range of external organisations, including the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the British Parking Association, the Association of British Insurers, and the European Secure Vehicle Alliance.