

Briefing Note

Subject:	Safer Communities Officer (SCO) Funding Post Project Shield (2026–27)
Date:	31 January 2026

Executive Summary

To summarise the impact of Project Shield within Northumberland, outline the implications of the Hotspot Action Fund ending on 31 March 2026, and to present the approach for securing Town and Parish Council contributions to retain the dedicated Project Shield Safer Communities Officer (SCO) team.

Purpose of Briefing Note

Northumberland County Council (NCC) Safer Communities Officers (SCOs) are uniformed, highly visible officers who work alongside police and partners to reduce antisocial behaviour (ASB), serious violence, and other linked harms that adversely impact communities. They provide targeted patrols across:

- Town centres
- Parks and open spaces
- Neighbourhoods
- Transport hubs and key routes

The Home Office has confirmed that the Hotspot Action Fund will end on 31 March 2026. NCC received notification of this on Friday 30 January 2026. This grant currently funds Northumberland’s contribution to Project Shield, meaning the dedicated SCO resource cannot be sustained without alternative funding.

Background

1. Loss of Funding and Resource Risk

- NCC currently has four (4) SCOs predominantly dedicated to Project Shield, fully funded through the Hotspot Action Fund.
- When the fund ends, NCC cannot retain the Project Shield SCO resource, as these officers cannot be maintained without Town and Parish Council contributions.

2. Project Shield – Impact and Added Value

Project Shield is a Northumbria Police force wide initiative, and Northumberland’s model has been particularly effective due to its integration within the Safer Northumberland Community Safety Partnership governance structure.

The model has delivered:

- Strong visibility and reassurance

- Early identification and response to emerging issues
- Partnership-led problem solving
- Preventative work addressing root causes of ASB, serious violence and other harms

3. Impact Across Northumberland

Significant measurable improvements have been recorded in:

- Cramlington – formerly a hotspot; no longer grant-funded due to reductions in ASB and related harms
- Blyth – strong visibility, engagement, reassurance, and reductions in ASB
- Ashington – similar reductions, visibility and community confidence
- Countywide transport network – improved safety on key routes and hubs

Feedback from Town Councils highlights overwhelmingly positive and highly impactful outcomes, with increased reassurance and improved reporting.

4. Local Funding Requirement

- NCC is seeking contributions from several Town and Parish Councils, and initially Ashington, Blyth, and Cramlington, to sustain the dedicated SCO presence.
- A shared deployment model is proposed, ensuring coverage across all contributing areas.

5. Value for Money

- £50,000 per officer per year
- 30 hours/week within communities
- 1,440 hours/year visible patrols (based on 48 weeks)
- £34.72 per patrol hour

Key Issues

- Home Office Notification – Hotspot Action Fund Ending (30 January 2026)
- Project Shield Impact and Performance Reports
- Safer Northumberland Community Safety Partnership Papers

Background Papers and Information

- Home Office Notification – Hotspot Action Fund Ending (30 January 2026)
- Project Shield Impact and Performance Reports
- Safer Northumberland Community Safety Partnership Papers

Recommendations

1. NCC commences engagement discussions to explore commitment levels and funding options.
2. Town and Parish Councils consider contributing to maintain the dedicated Project Shield SCO team.
3. A shared deployment model is developed with contributing councils.
4. Further detailed proposals and deployment plans to be produced once interest is confirmed.

Report Author

Name: Chris Grice, Strategic Community Safety and Partnership Manager

Elaine Brown

From:

Sent:

To:

Cc:

Subject:

Re: Project Shield Planning for 2026/27

Hi Elaine

Thanks for your email and for setting out your questions so clearly. I appreciate you taking the time to review the briefing note, and I hope the detail below helps to clarify the position as we look ahead to 2026/27.

Funding position and implications

As outlined in the briefing note, the Home Office has confirmed that the Hotspot Action Fund will end on 31 March 2026. This fund currently underpins Northumberland's contribution to the four Safer Communities Officers dedicated to Project Shield activity across Blyth, Ashington and the transport network. Without replacement funding, NCC would not be able to sustain these posts, meaning the dedicated Project Shield capacity, including proactive patrols, early-intervention work and the preventative activity that has been delivered this year, would not be able to continue in its current form.

Clarifying the "fully funded" point

The section of the briefing note referring to Project Shield SCO posts being "fully funded through the Hotspot Action Fund" relates specifically to the officers funded through that grant. The contributions made locally last year, including by Blyth Town Council, were used to *supplement the OPCC grant*, which by itself did not reach the level needed to support four SCO posts. Your contribution helped ensure that the model was viable at its current scale. I agree it's important that this distinction is clear, and I can bring a breakdown of the different funding sources to our meeting.

OPCC and other funding routes

We are actively exploring all possible external funding options, including discussions with the OPCC. At this point, however, there is no confirmed route that would replace the Hotspot Action Fund or maintain the current level of dedicated SCO resource. We are also monitoring the Government's wider national announcements on crime and antisocial behaviour funding for 2026–27, but allocations for Northumberland have not yet been published. Once that information becomes available, we'll understand whether there are implications for local policing or partnership arrangements.

We have considered funds such as Pride in Place, although current guidance suggests these schemes are not designed to sustain ongoing officer capacity. Nonetheless, we continue to review all opportunities as details evolve.

Funding model and contribution levels

As set out in the briefing note, the cost of an SCO post is based on a standard full-time model. For 2026/27, we are proposing a shared-deployment approach across participating areas, meaning any contribution from the Town Council would be scalable depending on the level of coverage you would wish to sustain in Blyth. Working through this in detail, with deployment data and options, would help shape a proportionate, value-for-money model.

Proposed next steps

Given the importance of securing clarity for the year ahead, I suggest we meet to discuss the funding breakdown, deployment options and potential implications for Blyth in more detail. I can make myself available at a time that works for you and Malcolm, and I will bring a clear set of scenarios and costed options.

Thanks again for raising these helpful questions and for your continuing support. I'm keen that we work collaboratively on a solution that protects as much of the positive work and visibility in Blyth as possible. Please let me know when would be convenient for a meeting.

Best wishes

Chris

Subject: Project Shield Planning for 2026/27

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Good morning, Chris

Thank you for your email.

We have no budget allocation for Project Shield in 2026/27 although it is on our agenda. What are the plans if no contributions are received?

The Briefing notes states:

Background – '4 SCO fully funded through the Hotspot Action Fund' - My understanding is that the £20k contribution from Blyth TC went towards this as well as £20K from Ashington TC and a figure from also from NCC. Can we have a detailed breakdown of the funding please?

Has a funding request been submitted to the OPCC? The precept of the OPCC for 2025 was significantly higher than that of Blyth Town Council, £195 to OPCC per Band D household compared to the Town Councils £135 per Band D household.

In December 2025, the Government announced £19.5 billion for 2026-27 to drive out crime and anti-social behaviour – has the grant allocation figure been published and will it have any impact of the policing provision within Blyth?

Pride in Place funding covers elements of tackling anti-social behaviour – has Safer Communities considered submitting a bid for this?

4 officers at £50k =£200k – how much exactly are you looking for?

Kind regards
Elaine



Elaine Brown FSLCC, GILCA, F&A

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Subject: Re: Project Shield Planning for 2026/27

Hi Elaine and Malcolm

I hope you're well.

Following Ian's introduction, I wanted to get in touch to provide an update on the funding position for Project Shield and outline the next steps. As Ian mentioned, I've recently taken on responsibility for the operational Safer Communities Team alongside my strategic community safety role, and I'm looking forward to working with you.

The funding position only became clear late on Friday following confirmation from the Home Office that the Hotspot Action Fund will end on 31 March 2026. Since then, we have been working at pace to develop options for sustaining the Project Shield Safer Communities Officer provision into 2026–27.

I've attached an initial proposal/briefing note which sets out the current position, the impact of the Project Shield model across the participating areas, and the approach we are taking to secure contributions for the year ahead. As part of this process, we are also beginning the same conversations with Ashington and Cramlington Town Councils in order to understand the collective level of support available.

Once you've had the chance to review the proposal, please feel free to get in touch with any questions or if you'd like to discuss any of the detail further. I'd be happy to meet or talk through the options.

Best wishes

Strategic Community Safety and Partnership Manager

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Subject: Project Shield Planning for 2026/27

Hi Malcolm, Elaine

Thank you for inviting myself and Zola to the meeting with the Town Council last Thursday.

I hope the Councillors found the feedback and update useful and are reassured that the team are having a positive impact within the town and are responding to the issues and priorities raised by the Councillors throughout our discussions about investing in the team to support the presence in Blyth.

The headlines from last week:

- ASB for Q3 2025 is down by 20% on Q3 for 2024 (and a few days in January - just the way Dawn presented the data) as it was Police Incident Reports
- ASB is now at its lowest level since 2022
- Project Shield patrols for Q3, 326 hours against an overall total of 940 (including Ashington and transport networks)
- 6 Tenancy Warnings Issued, 17 home visits
- Op Impact on 17th December focussed on the town centre
- Targeted work around Isabella Heap (motorbikes), Mermaid Car Park (vehicle related ASB) and town centre (linked to ongoing issues with street drinkers)

The team will provide the detail so we can share the monitoring form shortly.

I just wanted to make you aware of some small changes in Safe & Resilient Communities Team management structure. I am now stepping away from the Safer Communities work to focus on some other priorities.

So I would like to introduce my colleague Chris Grice, copied into the email, who currently leads on Strategic Community Safety and is now taking responsibility for the operational Safer Communities Team. Chris is a vastly experienced officer and there is sound rationale in bringing together the strategic and operational community safety functions so there should be minimal impact in terms of the work of the team and the relationship we have built throughout 2025.

I discussed with David at the end of the meeting that we needed a conversation about whether the Town Council wishes to continue to contribute to the costs of the team for the new financial year, 2026/27 so the purpose of this email is to connect you with Chris to follow up this conversation.

Thanks again for last week and hopefully we can continue the work over the next 12 months to continue to ensure Blyth remains a safe place for all.

All the best, Ian

Safe & Resilient Communities
Public Health, Inequalities & Stronger Communities
Northumberland County Council

County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF

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