

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