

Two local policing initiatives honoured



Two successful policing initiatives within Edinburgh have been honoured at the finals of the Police Scotland Local Policing Year One Awards.

The Force launched the internal awards to recognise innovation and excellence in delivering and supporting local policing across Scotland. Teams from across the country were invited to submit entries in seven categories:

- * Partnership working
- * Tackling crime
- * Diversionary projects
- * Communications
- * Change and innovation
- * Public safety
- * Consultation and community engagement

At the Scottish Police College in Tulliallan today, police in Edinburgh and their partners at the Scottish Prison Service won the 'Tackling Crime' category for their work as part of Operation Avocation.

Tackling serious organised crime is a priority for the Force and within the city, officers responsible for responding to HMP Edinburgh have for a long time been working alongside partners at the Scottish Prison Service to tackle criminal activity occurring behind bars.

Crimes, which previously took place within the facility, included drug possession and drug dealing; possession of contraband items and assault and so Operation Avocation was launched to disrupt all offences detected at the prison.

The campaign saw Police Scotland officers work closely with prison service colleagues on various enforcement activities and resulted in the formation of the Prison Watch scheme, which has been a successful tool in preventing the supply of illicit and contraband material entering into HMP Edinburgh.

Prison Watch has also previously been awarded with Prison Watch has also previously been awarded with the Butler Trust Award hosted by HRH The Princess Royal.

Constable Tracey Gunn from Operation Avocation said: 'We are delighted to have one this category at the Scottish Policing Awards. Police Scotland has an excellent working relationship with the staff at HMP Edinburgh. I feel very proud due to the fact that we have worked extremely hard to ensure the safety of prisoners, visitors and prison staff in relation to contraband within the prison and to deter, disrupt and detect members of local organized crime groups.

"Due to the success of Operation Avocation in HMP Edinburgh I hope that this joint initiative can be replicated in all Scottish prisons.

Edinburgh police and their relevant partner agencies were also successful in the 'Working in Partnership' category thanks to the success of an innovative information-sharing campaign between hotels within the Capital.

In late 2007, PC Bruce Burt and the Security Manager at the Sheraton Grand Hotel and Spa conceived the idea of hotels within the city sharing information with a view to tackling all types of crime in the hotels.

Checkin was launched in May 2008 and has created an active

group of 100 hotels in Edinburgh. Although in competition for guests, they have formed a coalition to combat criminal activity. They share information including CCTV images between themselves about criminal or suspicious behaviour. This allows them to protect each other from future crime and adapt to changing crime patterns.

The Checkin group uses a simple and secure website (www.checkinhotelsedinburgh.co.uk) to allow its members to share information. The one off cost of the website was £2300 with annual hosting costs of £130. Essential Edinburgh who manages the Business Improvement District in Edinburgh City Centre funded the site. The annual hosting is funded by the Edinburgh Hotel Association.

Since its creation Checkin has been responsible for a significant amount of arrests relating to not just local recidivist offenders but Organised Crime Groups from the UK and abroad.

Prior to the creation of Checkin in Edinburgh Hotels would frequently find local recidivist offenders within their hotels. Rather than alerting the police they would escort the person from the hotel believing that since they hadn't stolen anything nothing could be done. The hotels have since been educated about Section 57 of the Civic Government (Scotland) Act and now regularly report intruders to the police and other hotels. This has seen an increase in section 57 offences being reported and persons identified and charged. By reporting these persons break-ins to hotel rooms have been prevented. In the four years prior to the creation of Checkin hoteliers experienced annual break-ins ranging from 64 to 79. In the fourth year after the creation of Checkin this figure was down to just 10 break-ins. Comparing crime data four years before the creation of Checkin and the subsequent four after saw an overall 23% drop in crime down from 2119 to 1623 crimes.

Constable Bruce Burt from the Checkin team said: "Winning this

category at the Local Policing Awards is testimony to the excellent partnership working between Police Scotland and the Hotel Sector.

“It is hoped a successful entry at the Local Policing Awards will enable the work of the Checkin Group to be replicated throughout Scotland’s towns and cities creating an enviable network keeping staff and visitors to Scotland’s Hotel Safe.”

Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick added: “The Local Policing Year One Awards recognise innovation and excellence in delivering policing across Scotland and share best practice.

“The Awards enable us to celebrate the achievements of Police Scotland officers and staff and their partners in keeping people safe and tackling the policing priorities identified by local communities.”