

Operation Redeemer – preventing sexual offences when vehicles are used to aid offending

Identifying vehicles involved in targeting vulnerable people in the night-time economy.

First published

18 April 2024

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
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Region	North East
Partners	Police
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	February 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Offenders Victims
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Aim

The aims of initiative are to:

- identify vehicles of concern which are targeting vulnerable people when driving around the night-time economy, or parking in locations where vulnerable people may assume they are a licensed taxi
- prevent vulnerable people from becoming victims of sexual violence when frequenting Newcastle city centre - improving general safety, trust and confidence
- task all officers on patrol to remain alert and vigilant

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are:

- reduced incidents of sexual offences
- increased intelligence relating to sexual offending
- identification of perpetrators within the night-time economy who are using vehicles to facilitate offences
- the identification of unlicensed taxis operating in the area

Description

Known as Operation Redeemer, this initiative seeks to prevent and reduce sexual offences both inside and outside Newcastle city centre. It originated as a trial project in Northumbria Police and is currently in the process of being rolled out in force as business as usual. The need for Operation Redeemer was identified through Operation Cloak, an initiative in which specially trained officers are deployed in Newcastle city centre with the aim of identifying vulnerability while doing plain clothes foot patrol.

Intelligence gathered through Operation Cloak suggested that individuals were using vehicles to target vulnerable people in the night-time economy. As a result, this initiative was established to identify vehicles being used by perpetrators that could be assumed to be a taxi because of their parked location.

Dedicated officers are deployed to Operation Redeemer as paid overtime from their operational roles (often neighbourhood policing teams) and receive a bespoke briefing for deployments. The briefings include an up-to-date intelligence picture which covers persons and vehicles of interest.

A typical operation runs with one sergeant and five officers/staff including a trained surveillance loggist. The CCTV control room of the local authority is made available for the team. The camera room officers identify vehicles and persons of interest. Plain clothes officers conduct the same observations in areas not covered by the CCTV systems. The operation has a live directed surveillance authority in place (covert monitoring). Automatic number plate recognition technology is also utilised to identify previously known vehicles entering the night-time economy area.

Once a potential vehicle is identified (this may be via observations or automatic number plate recognition - ANPR - activation), background checks are undertaken. If the vehicle is stopped, uniformed officers engage with the individuals in the vehicle. Body worn cameras are used, and staff will actively engage with the persons, taking and recording details and establishing the context of the persons' relationship / association. Officers will carry out safeguarding as necessary.

If any offences are identified, positive action is taken. This includes uplifting the vehicles if involved in crime and a section 165 (obtaining the name and address of drivers) for vehicles purporting to be taxis /delivery drivers without the required insurance.

In the event of the uniform aspect of the operation not being available, plain clothes officers will dynamically risk assess the situation and intervene if necessary.

Operation Redeemer is currently funded via Safer Streets 4 and was initially financed via Operation Cloak. Operation Redeemer supports the agenda of creating safe spaces and addressing violence against women and girls (VAWG) and sexual violence.

Overall impact

Monitoring is being led by Northumbria Police and is ongoing. Early indications of the initiative identified:

- 16 operational deployments
- 81 interventions / stops
- 11 arrests / summons
- 16 vehicles uplifted, one was used in crime while all the others had no insurance
- 18 potentially vulnerable persons safeguarded
- seven section 59 notices issued (vehicle seized where the vehicle has been driven in a careless or anti-social manner)
- one application ongoing for an interim sexual risk order
- evidence has shown that nominals who were regularly frequenting the city centre at the start of the operation in vehicles ceased to do so at the end of the trial operation
- evidence indicates that disruption tactics are effective in deterring crime

Learning

- Funding is crucial for Operation Redeemer. In Northumbria Police, plans are in place to allow for Operation Redeemer to become self-sufficient, limiting the need for external funding.
- Funding is especially important to be able to train and advance vet loggists. Officers from neighbourhood teams can receive both this training and vetting in Northumbria Police due to a funding grant provided by the police and crime commissioner.
- Collaboration and relationship building with the local authority is key. Effective relationships allow for the force to work alongside the local authority to identify vehicles and effectively utilise CCTV. Collaboration also includes stakeholders such as Security Industry Authority (SIA) staff, taxi marshals and also street pastors. It is key all partners are informed of the operations.
- Senior leader support and buy in has enabled Operation Redeemer to move from trial stage towards becoming business as usual in Northumbria Police.

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Tags

Violence against women and girls Vulnerable people Safeguarding