

Operation Elegance – initial investigation team for shoplifting

Increasing positive outcomes and victim satisfaction in shoplifting offences.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Evaluated locally
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Retail crime Neighbourhood crime Investigation
Organisation	Northamptonshire Police
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Region	East Midlands
Partners	Business and commerce Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services)
Stage of Implementation	The practice is at a pilot stage.
Start date	May 2023
Completion date	November 2023

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Offenders Victims

Aim

- Improving services provided to victims of shoplifting by building up relationships with targeted stores.
- Enhancing engagement with victims of shoplifting by being more involved with the evidence gathering procedures. An example of this is statement taking. Stores reported that they felt more supported compared to standard procedure where they are sent digital information packs to collect their own evidence such as CCTV footage, with limited intervention from the police force.
- Pursuing retail crime offenders ensuring they are brought to justice, particularly those who are prolific or high risk. With a focus on desk research and streamlining the criminal proceedings by pre-authorising charges before arrest.
- Maximising opportunities for positive outcomes by increasing charges and targeting more prolific offenders.
- Maximising evidence and intelligence gathering opportunities.
- Maximising prevention, intervention and problem-solving opportunities by increasing police interventions with repeat victims, collaborating with local neighbourhood teams, taking a multi-agency approach and addressing shoplifting from a holistic perspective.
- Working effectively with partner agencies and internal stakeholders to streamline the charging process of shoplifting crimes.
- Reducing bureaucracy or blocks to performance and release capacity within the local policing areas to focus on wider priorities.

Intended outcome

- An increase in shoplifting charges and a decrease in outcome 15 cases (cases where the victim supports police action and the crime is confirmed, but further action is prevented by evidential difficulties), measured through Northamptonshire Police's internal database, Qlick.

- Long term reduction in offending, as more prolific offenders will be served criminal charges.
- Better victim satisfaction measured by qualitative feedback.

Description

Background

It was identified that the shoplifting positive outcome rate was on average 13% and there was a high number of cases filed as Outcome 15, where suspects had been identified but there was no prosecution based on issues gathering evidence. Operation Elegance was established with the aim to decrease outcome 15 cases by improving coordination between the police, partners and victims of shoplifting.

A small team was gathered to form Operation Elegance, which is staffed by a police sergeant, three constables, and two staff retail crime evidence gatherers following further funding by the Northamptonshire Office of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (OFPCC). The officer posts were from an existing department and did not require uplift.

Operation Elegance sought buy-in from justice partners for appropriate cases to have charges authorised before being sent for secondary investigation. With the criminal justice unit, a vision for introducing gathering evidence at the source and assessing evidence for eligibility for pre-arrest charges was discussed. The criminal justice unit supported pre-arrest charges where there was sufficient evidence.

Operation Elegance is an initial investigation team who coordinate and collate evidence before the case is sent to local policing areas for arrest and/or interview as required. The officer picking up the case just needs to arrest, charge and submit the file – most of which will have been pre-built for them. Charge decisions being made before arrest is not common across all forces – this is reliant on strong sufficient evidence, such as CCTV.

Prevention and intervention work

This is through working with frequently targeted stores with crime prevention, such as:

- A shop that sold alcohol was being targeted by shoplifters daily. The team contacted the licensing team and organised a discussion with the retail senior management of the store. This persuaded

them to get a security officer in, which in turn led to a drop in shoplifting.

- Ensuring public protection notices (PPN) were put in place if offenders were vulnerable.

Northamptonshire Police believe it is important to recognise the vulnerabilities of offenders, as this can support multi-agency meetings and holistic approaches.

The team quickly built strong partnerships with stores by increasing engagement with victims of shoplifting. Feedback from victims indicated that victim confidence started to increase, making collection of evidence easier, and positive outcomes increased to a high of 37% in July 2023.

Outcome 15 offences also reduced.

Overall impact

The Operation Elegance pilot was monitored by Northamptonshire Police in August 2023, after three months of implementation. The evaluation highlights the successes of the team, such as three prolific offenders linked to serious acquisitive offending being jailed due to the initiative.

The initiative was set up as a six-month trial, however due to the positive outcomes, the evaluation recommends having a retail crime team as a permanent fixture in the Initial Investigation Team (IIT). It is acknowledged within the evaluation that this will require further resource including uplifting officers/sergeants to work within the retail crime team.

An increase in positive outcomes has been observed:

- Through their internal data system (Qlick) Northamptonshire Police have observed an increase in shoplifting charges. In the months January and February 2023 13% of shoplifting offences had resulted in criminal charges. By July 2023, this had increased to 37%. This increase in charges has also resulted in a decrease in outcome 15 offences.
- Victim satisfaction – evidence of this has been identified through officer engagements, verbal feedback and victims more willing to engage with the police.
- Notable capacity released within the local policing areas due to the work completed by Operation Elegance as many cases did not require interviews and offenders could be charged more efficiently.

Learning

- As victim confidence increased, reporting of shoplifting offences increased due to better engagement with retailers/victims. The local policing areas were concerned to see an increase in shoplifting in their workload. Operation Elegance countered this by reassuring them the case file would be built prior to arrest, lessening the officers' workload. Joint efforts on the individuals will draw them away from wider offending with shoplifters also linked to serious acquisitive crime.
- Resources are finite, and bidding for resources can be difficult. The officers making up the team are officers on restricted duty. This made forming the team easier. There is value in looking at officers on restricted duty, it is a great opportunity to give them value and use their skills from a static environment, with buy-in from their local police environment.
- Ensure you are coordinated with criminal justice partners and get their support.

Best available evidence

Currently, the [Crime Reduction Toolkit](#) does not include an intervention similar to this reducing retail theft initiative, but it does include the best-available evidence on [CCTV](#) and on [retail tagging to prevent shop theft](#).

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Tags

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