

Operation Parksafes – reducing road danger

Reporting parking offences online in response to a key community priority.

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Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Crime prevention
Organisation	South Yorkshire Police
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Region	North East
Partners	Police Education Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is no longer being implemented.
Start date	June 2022
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	General public Offenders
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Aim

Operation Parksafe uses problem-solving principles to reduce road danger. It maximises established techniques in crime prevention. Operation Parksafe uses a safe system approach to achieve [Vision Zero](#) by:

- giving a public-facing explanation of road traffic law
- giving online guidance to show whether an offence is dealt with by the police or the local authority
- encouraging citizens to solve problems in their community
- identifying members of the public who could give the same evidence a police officer would use to prosecute
- increasing responsibility by responding and triaging offences to reduce danger to the public

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes for Operation Parksafe are to:

- reduce the number of dangerously and anti-social parked vehicles
- provide a web-based platform where the public can report local parking offences
- encourage the public to help enforce the law, making the roads safer
- increase road safety and improve community satisfaction

Description

Background

Sheffield is the fourth largest city in England, with the majority of the housing and streets built at a time that did not anticipate mass motor vehicle ownership. This means that in areas where Victorian and early 20th century housing is common, there has been an increase in competition for space to park vehicles. This has led to more parked vehicles on the road.

Over the last 20 years there has been an increase of 32% in the number of motor vehicles kept in the UK. The types of motor vehicles have become larger due to trends for sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and an increase in the number of vans purchased.

In Sheffield the 33,000 cars registered in the past 10 years would stretch for 126km, if parked tail to fender on a single road. The additional vans registered would occupy 50km of road space. Over the same period, average car size has also increased. This has increased reports of dangerous parking as well as obstruction.

In 2021, residents in north west Sheffield voted parking issues as their second largest concern. This highlighted the importance of parking as a community issue. It came as a bit of a surprise, even though the force had already conducted work to reduce dangerous parking on two rural roads.

The police found this issue hard to solve due to inefficient and outdated processes. If a member of the public wanted to report danger from a parked vehicle they had to call 101 or submit an online report. Both methods take time and often, when a police community support officer (PCSO) had got there, the obstruction had cleared due to the amount of time that had passed.

The force identified that there was confusion among the public as to who enforces parking offences. This arose from the decriminalisation of some parking offences in the early 2000s.

Changes meant that often the police had no power to deal with vehicles contravening road signs. Similarly, council enforcement officers cannot deal with obstruction of the highway or dangerous position parking offences. Local authorities are unable to enforce any offences that would result in an endorsement to a driving licence.

Response

In June 2022, Operation Parksafesafe launched a platform allowing members of the public to report traffic offences to the police. They can also send in digital photographs via the platform. These reports are triaged and used to prosecute those whose park vehicles in a dangerous or anti-social manner. Behavioural nudges are also used to reduce offending. This includes the use of a specific website and social media posts.

The scheme has been especially effective in response to dangerous school parking. Parents and teachers have reported drivers endangering children by their behaviour. In the past this would

result in requests for PCSOs to patrol near the school. This would often result in no issues on that day due to visible capable guardians. The north west area of Sheffield includes 39 schools and only 11 deployable PCSOs. This makes it impossible to provide constant supervision of all school gate times.

Successful convictions were publicised on social media to amplify the message that dangerous parking is not acceptable. This resulted in an increase in reports from another area who became aware of the scheme, leading to a further reduction of offences.

Cost effectiveness

Using the Parksafes platform takes an average of 9 minutes for a member of the public to report an offence. This is faster than the average time for taken to submit an online report through the generic portal. Each submission takes between 5 to 15 minutes to process. This is less than the average travel time taken by a PCSO attending a location to respond to a parking complaint.

A cost-benefit analysis shows this is an effective use of taxpayer's money. The hourly cost for a PCSO is around £22. This means that each prosecution costs £5.50 in PCSO hourly costs, but does not incur any further costs such as the fuel cost (and associated CO2 emissions) from travelling.

The real efficiency saving is likely to be even more, given that PCSOs usually work in pairs. This means that deploying PCSOs to a parking complaint costs the organisation £22. This is based on two officers, travel time of 15 minutes and the time taken to issue traffic offence report (TOR) at the scene. In removing the control room from the process, each report received through Operation Parksafes saves police £11.20 in call handler and dispatcher costs.

Evaluation

South Yorkshire Police conducted a process evaluation. This involved gathering evidence from the Home Office, neighbourhood team and the public. The findings provide an insight into the type and make of vehicle in Sheffield, the number of offences committed and the impact this has on road traffic incidents.

Evidence shows that in the first 16 months of Operation Parksafes, there were 876 reports made to police. Evidence provided by the public is enough for prosecution in approximately 83% of cases.

The types of offences are around 50% obstruction (£30 fine), but a third of reports provide evidence of dangerous position offences. These result in a £100 fine and three-point driving licence endorsement. Based on evidence provided by the public, 727 offences have been prosecuted.

Examination of frequently reported streets (pareto analysis) shows the pattern of reports follows a pattern. When residents become aware of the scheme there is an initial spike in reports. However, after the first batch of enforcement letters the number of reported parking offences reduces. This is believed to be evidence that the scheme works. If the letters were not having an effect on people's behaviour, steady responses would be expected on these streets.

Cost-benefit analysis shows that this online system is more cost effective than reactive approaches. It is particularly effective at reducing the issue by increasing guardianship and risks to offenders. It is a low-cost method of reducing road danger with potential for national application.

The operation is currently being assessed for use across the entirety of south Yorkshire with website infrastructure and training under development.

Overall impact

Operation Parksafes was a Tilley Award finalist in 2023.

- Since its introduction in June 2022, the platform has been used to make more than 1,100 parking reports. Over 80% of these reports have resulted in enforcement action.
- The launch of Operation Parksafes resulted in a fall in the percentage of members of the public who stated that parking was one of their top three priorities. In 2021-22, 49% of the public told us this was one of their highest priorities. This reduced to 29% in 2022-23.
- The quality of the evidence submitted by the public is often better than that which would be provided by officers.
- Reducing the number of dangerously parked vehicles is likely to reduce the number of road traffic collisions. In 2021 there were 6,855 parked vehicles and 749 light goods vehicles involved in reportable road traffic collisions.
- By publicising the scheme using the hashtag #OpParksafes, South Yorkshire Police has been approached by other forces to explain experiences and provide advice on how they might go about setting up their own version.

Learning

- PCSOs are now more aware of parking offences. They are also submitting more self-generated TORs. This means that the public can see that South Yorkshire Police is dealing with issues they care about. Since launching Operation Parksafes, there has been a substantial reduction in offences.
- The importance of clear and concise messaging was discussed at the local council quarterly meeting to prevent confusion or misinterpretation by the public, council and force.
- By enabling and encouraging third party reporting, enforcement can take place anytime, anywhere or anywhere, and not only when law-enforcement officers are visible. The scheme has been proven in court, is more cost effective than other responses, and engages citizens by solving problems they care about.

Update

Operation Parksafes was launched as a solution for a local area with a specific problem of dangerous parking that had high levels of community support for police action. Within that area, there was high use of the scheme, some members of the public clearly liked the approach and political leaders saw the value. Other areas did not experience the parking problem to the same degree and therefore did not want to introduce ParkSafe.

The product of Parksafes activities were endorsable offence investigations, requiring the registered keeper to be served with a notice of intended prosecution within 14 days. If the registered keeper fails to reply, or challenges the allegation, then a prosecution file upgrade is required, creating more demand for the central ticket office (CTO).

As the approach reacts to the submission of isolated images, where one person's view is that the parking is dangerous or inconsiderate (to which the driver may have a different view), a significant proportion of cases resulted in prosecution files.

This led to a growing demand upon the CTO from the trial area, causing the function's ability to service existing workloads to be compromised. There was then something of a postcode lottery where motorists were being treated differently in one part of the city, let alone the force area. If Operation Parksafes were to be extended throughout the force area, to create a consistent approach, there would be a need for a substantial increase in staffing within the CTO at a significant cost.

South Yorkshire Police therefore reluctantly made the decision to cease Operation Parksafes.

Meanwhile, Sheffield City Council had been successful in their application to be granted additional powers to respond to parking obstructions. They have introduced a team of parking enforcement officers who can respond to concerns from members of the public. These officers act on reports of problematic parking and respond with penalty charge notices at their discretion.

The force is invested in Vision Zero and is developing other ways to contribute to this national approach to making our roads safer. Actions such as encouraging all of our neighbourhood policing teams to take more direct action in road safety hot-spots, such as in the vicinity of schools have been implemented.

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