

Reducing vulnerability within the night-time economy

Reducing vulnerability and crime in the night-time economy by introducing welfare and vulnerability strategies.

First published
10 March 2025

Key details

Does it work?	Promising
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Crime prevention Violence against women and girls Violence (other) Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Suffolk Constabulary
Contact	Dan Peck
Email address	daniel.peck@suffolk.police.uk
Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Business and commerce
Stage of practice	The practice is no longer being implemented.
Start date	October 2023

Key details

Completion date	March 2024
Target group	Adults Communities General public Victims

Aim

- To reduce serious and sexual violence within the night-time economy (NTE).
- Reduce vulnerability and the opportunity to commit crime in the NTE.
- Work with partners in the NTE to reduce vulnerability and crime.
- Educate partners and the public to reduce vulnerability and crime in the NTE.

Intended outcome

The project had three measurable intended outcomes.

- Reduce violence with injury and sexual violence linked to the licensing and night-time economy (NTE) industry through engagement with venues. This would be measured through quantitative data, using the number of incidents being recorded at identified licensed premises and within the street in the vicinity of the NTE. It was hoped a reduction in incidents and therefore victims would be achieved through the intervention.
- Reduce violence with injury and sexual violence in public open spaces linked to the licensing and night-time economy industry through engagement with community stakeholders. This relied on community partners to fund environmental design changes and/or street repairs. It was established through the project that meaningful results would likely be achieved within the funding period, however this work is ongoing and continuing through other work streams.
- Reduce violence with injury and sexual violence linked to the licensing and night-time economy industry through engagement with educational establishments. Throughout the project it became clear that the third objective was unlikely to be achieved during the project period.

Description

The project was commissioned based on research that identified an upward year on year trend of serious and sexual violence linked to licensed premises in Suffolk since 2017.

The total spend on the project was £14,266.90 and was funded through the Serious Violence Duty (SVD). The majority of this funding was spent on increasing the hours of in-house licensing officers by 14.8 hours per week to be allocated to the project.

The role of the SVD licensing officer was to:

- identify venues and public spaces near to venues, that experience repeat assault, weapon, drink spiking and sexual violence offences
- work with the public, NTE venues and community stakeholders to introduce measures to reduce the likelihood of crime and disorder and promote public safety
- introduce new practices within NTE venues, working with them to create vulnerability and welfare strategies
- reduce the strength of alcohol on sale from off-licenses across the county, so that low-cost high alcohol content products cannot be purchased in Suffolk
- identify locations that create vulnerability within the night-time economy. Liaise with key stakeholders to reduce opportunities for offending
- co-ordinate proactive deployment of crime reduction apparatus that can be used through multiple venues
- plan and co-ordinate NTE Engagement Nights, where required (NTE engagement nights included low level engagement from a pair of dedicated officers to undertake targeted licensing visits and patrols of areas of vulnerability on the periphery of the NTE and, additional officers deployed into the NTE with crime prevention products for example, anti-spiking silicone cup covers/bottle tops)
- liaise with children and young persons officers to enhance educational inputs related to alcohol and drug harm given to higher education students
- bring partner agencies and community stakeholders together to build a culture of protecting vulnerable people and reducing opportunities for serious violence to occur.

Activity was focused in two towns that had NTE areas – Ipswich and Bury St Edmunds. Licensing officers worked with the five highest demand nightclubs in these areas. They provided training and guidance documents to assist the venue in creating "welfare and vulnerability" policies to focus on early intervention during key NTE hours. The venues appointed a "welfare officer" role who had a toolkit of tactics to intervene where vulnerability was identified. This included "The Power of Hello",

an offer of free soft drinks, available "chill out" space within venues and a heightened awareness of vulnerability.

Other interventions included the following.

- Drug testing on arrival as a condition of entry into venues.
- Venues using breath testing devices to depersonalise refusal of entry. This worked by giving a breathalyser and tubes to door supervisors and training them to use it. They were then able to use the device when they suspected someone was too intoxicated for entry, this helped to depersonalise the refusal of entry and reduce conflict between patrons and door supervisors.
- Deployment of an SOS Bus on higher risk NTE dates to provide a public safe space. The SOS Bus is a social outreach service that operates within the NTE and public events. The bus was deployed to areas near to the NTE but not directly outside clubs and pubs. It was in a highly visible location, police officers on public order duties, Street Pastors and door supervisors were made aware of its location and could direct people to the bus when required. The high risk NTE nights included Halloween and a local football derby which coincided with a busy Saturday night leading up to Christmas.
- Conducting a survey with the public to identify locations on the outskirts of the NTE where people felt less safe and whether they had been a victim or witnessed crime in the NTE in the last 12 months. This allowed us to establish the prevalence of crime types and fear of crime within the NTE community. This was mainly conducted via an online form through social media marketing. It was also conducted by officers on NTE engagement nights with members of the public. Data from the survey helped steer policing operations.
- Undertaking environmental surveys or asking community partners to take action. An example of environmental survey was to suggest to the local authority that a footpath commonly used by pedestrians on their route home would benefit from improved lighting and better surveillance. This could be achieved by upgrading existing lighting to LED, cutting back vegetation and installing additional CCTV cameras.
- Deployment of officers to vulnerable locations on the outskirts of the NTE and common walking routes home for the public, with a focus on vulnerability and crime reduction.

The project ended when the SVD funding period ended (March 2024). Suffolk Constabulary are looking at alternative funding opportunities to continue this work.

Evaluation

An evaluation has been completed and was led by Suffolk Constabulary.

The evaluation used quantitative methods to highlight the direct impact of the project on the public who use the NTE and its venues.

Quantitative measures included:

- total number of people attending venues in receipt of enhanced vulnerability and welfare training
- the number of people refused entry due to vulnerability and welfare concerns
- the number of people searched before entry to each venue
- total interventions to reduce vulnerability and improve welfare
- incidents of serious or sexual violence taking place during the project period in the NTE
- comparison data for serious or sexual violence incidents (compared the project period, to the same period but for the previous year)
- policing demand during the project period
- comparison data for policing demand (compared the project period, to the same period but for the previous year)

Qualitative methods were used to collect public opinion obtained through engaging with members of the public during the NTE and anecdotal data provided by venue staff and by officers deployed on policing operations to feedback their views on the project, feelings of safety, venues and funded activity.

According to the evaluation the intervention appears to have had a positive impact. Results of the evaluation looked at the project period (September 2023- March 2024) and compared the same period from the previous 12 months (September 2022- March 2023). Results included the following.

- Demand reduction – This is a calculation of the percentage change of all incidents during the project period, compared to the same period in the previous 12 months. For example, the project period was September 2023 to March 2024. This was compared to data available for September 2022 and March 2023. The findings of the evaluation indicate that 75 fewer crimes were recorded and demand was reduced by 38.1%. Cost reduction – Suffolk Constabulary have developed a cost- benefit calculator, which is calibrated using specific resource costs information for the force and investigation costs from the Home Office Economic and Social Costs of crime (adjusted for

inflation to reflect 2023/2024 prices). This reduction in demand of attending incidents' was estimate to have saved Suffolk Constabulary around £99,000.

- Sexual or serious violent offences – This is a calculation of the percentage change of incidents classified as, actual bodily harm (ABH), grievous bodily harm (GBH), wounding, affray, sexual assault, sexual harassment, or Rape associated to all venues during the project period compared to the same period the previous year. There was a reduction in sexual or serious violent offences by 47%.
- Total beneficiaries – This is a count of the total number of people that have directly benefitted from the project. This is the sum of those people who received direct intervention by club welfare officers, police intervention during patrols. During the project period there were 2,811 beneficiaries.

Qualitative findings

Throughout the project, the public within the NTE were engaging and supportive of police activity. The proactive policing operations, including drug sampling as a condition of entry, was particularly favourable with younger female members of the community. Through public engagement we were able to identify locations that were repeatedly raised as making people feel less safe. This allowed us to focus our response to local authorities and other stakeholders to remedial action within these areas.

There was mixed feedback from door supervisors regarding the use of breath testing device. They were generally supportive of having the option to use the device but suggested that some members of the public did not welcome being challenged with a breathalyser by door supervisors, suggesting they were “trying to be police”. This would likely be overcome if the use of breathalysers became common place within the NTE.

Feedback from the licensing officers who delivered the bulk of partnership working with venues felt that the intervention was a positive initiative and had a valued impact on safety and security in the NTE. They suggested this is an area of work they would like to do more but are restricted by other demands within normal working practices.

Police officers deployed on NTE operations, specifically on drug sampling condition of entry operations, suggested this was a good use of their time and felt they were working pro-actively in the NTE, rather than being reactive to fights and drunken behaviour. Officers undertaking engagement patrols were less enthusiastic about their deployments but saw value in patrolling

areas that were not included in routine NTE plans and patrols.

Overall impact

The overall impact of the intervention has been a reduction in crime associated with sexual or serious violence. Venue staff are better educated and continue to focus on vulnerability after the project period has ended and this has created a safer NTE within Suffolk. During the project period 75 less crimes were recorded, which amounts to 75 less victims of sexual or serious violent offences and a cost saving to policing in the region of £99,000, using the cost-benefit calculator.

The legacy of the project is that locations have been identified as contributing to a feeling of vulnerability and lack of safety and many of these align to anti-social behaviour (ASB) hot spots within the policing area. Work is ongoing with local authorities to address some of the issues highlighted to improve safety and crime reduction through changes to environmental design.

Learning

- Utilising the right resources within policing allowed for this project to work effectively with NTE venues.
- The project was supported from the outset by senior leaders. Through this support a bid for funding was written and presented at the serious violence duty (SVD) panel. The strategic oversight, knowledge and experience led to buying from community safety partners who have oversight of the funding. However, a bid for a second round of funding was not successful and this was likely due to a change in how the funding was allocated.
- Support from officers for overtime was relatively forthcoming. The officers have a clear brief and had been “ring fenced” from other demands. A briefing was delivered to local inspectors responsible for NTE and direction that their hours were funded through the Home Office and therefore they would not be routinely deployable to other incidents. The force believe this assisted in officer volunteering for the overtime as they knew they wouldn’t be re-deployed on arrival at the station.
- Good partnership working – the licensing officer had established relationships with venues and were able to work with them to implement welfare and vulnerability staff roles.
- It was not possible to achieve all three objectives without additional funding and resource. The final objective relating to education was the most challenging to achieve for several reasons. Due to a change in Suffolk’s policing model, the number of school officers significantly reduced. This

meant that creating a suitable product, with the specific Suffolk Constabulary branding for school delivery products in time for the next academic year and getting a product signed off by the education manager in the council, became unachievable. It was decided that the focus should be on the first two objectives which could be achieved by local policing and the licensing team.

- The public survey was delivered through our corporate communications team and publicised mainly through Facebook, other social media sites and through officers on engagement patrols within the NTE. This led to a mixture of target and non-target audience responding to the survey. Better focus on where and how to undertake meaningful surveying would be useful should the project be reinstated.
- The survey was conducted during the first month of the project. It was planned to re-run the survey at the end of the project, but due to a change in policy, the second survey was not conducted. This would have been a good opportunity to explore change throughout the project.
- The project ended when the SVD funding period ended (March 2024). Additional funding was bid for in the next round of the SVD funding, however this was not successful and therefore there were no available funds to continue the project. Suffolk Constabulary are now exploring if the project could be re-funded through the Hotspot Policing fund, but this is not yet put into practice.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.