

Operation Brandberg – shared nominal pathways for begging and shop theft

Creating a nominal pathway to guide police and local partner's management of begging and shoplifting repeat offenders.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Reoffending
Topic	Retail crime Theft and burglary Offender management
Organisation	Nottinghamshire Police
Contact	Zoe Dring
Email address	zoe.dring@notts.police.uk
Region	East Midlands
Partners	Police Business and commerce Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Health services Local authority

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2023
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Offenders

Aim

Operation Brandberg aims to:

- create a nominal pathway, begging guidance and retail crime groups, all of which would allow the police and other local partners to work together to tackle these repeat offenders
- guide these individuals to using support services provided by Changing Futures and Nottingham City Council

Intended outcome

Operation Brandberg's intended outcomes are to:

- reduce the number of begging and shoplifting offences carried out by the targeted offenders
- improve support for offenders
- ensure members of the public and the retail workers feel safe
- reduce demand on police resources

Description

Nottinghamshire Police's intention is to reduce the amount of begging and theft by implementing a streamlined process for dealing with repeat offenders. Individuals engaged in begging tactics like entering customers cars to beg and distressing the public. Extensive shoplifting led to retail staff being harassed and shops losing money. Repeat offenders often commit crimes in multiple

locations to avoid detection. The force therefore recognised a strategy needed to be developed to divert individuals from criminal behaviour.

Operation Brandberg

The initial operation identified 64 individuals, all monitored through an excel spreadsheet. These identified individuals consisted of males and females, with ages ranging from early 20s to late 50s. Each individual is assigned a police officer handler. The listed individuals all have issues relating to begging, homelessness, and addiction to alcohol and drugs. Currently there is no control group in place. All individuals are placed on the nominal pathway to maximise engagement and opportunities.

Referrals to Changing Futures are a key element of the Operation Brandberg process. Changing Futures is government programme aiming to improve outcomes for adults experiencing multiple disadvantage by co-ordinating support from a variety of local services to deliver a ‘whole person’ approach that stabilises and then improves the life of a person in crisis. Changing Futures aims to provide holistic support by tackling a range of issues, including mental health, housing, education, substance abuse and employment.

The Operation Brandberg process is as follows:

- first encounter – an individual is given a Changing Futures referral, community protection warning (CPW) and first begging warning. CPW conditions means the individual must not:
 - beg or gather alms
 - sit or loiter in the vicinity of shops, businesses or vacant properties
 - enter any retail premises from which they have been banned
- second encounter – an individual is given a Changing Futures referral. CPW conditions have been breached and a community protection notice (CPN) is issued and the individual is given a second begging warning
- third encounter – an individual is given a Changing Futures referral. The CPN has been breached and the force and apply for a criminal behaviour order (CBO)

Nottinghamshire Police's resources

- organisational future proofing structure - designated neighbourhood policing team (NPT) single point of contact (SPOC) are required to ensure that implementation of Operation Brandberg is carried out and maintained
- the force has implemented begging guidance to be adopted by the NPTs
- individuals are identified and maintained by the NPT's beat managers and PCSOs. They then decide if these nominals are committing persistent criminal behaviour and if so, start the monitoring process
- PCSO's are able to produce retail crime galleries which identify 'Gold' targets for support and engagement. Police constables are able to use this to progress individuals along the 'nominal pathway'
- anti-social behaviour (ASB) problem solving officers - A new addition to the force, ASB Problem solving officers support the NPT and assist in the issuing of CBO's

Stakeholders

Problem-solver stakeholder engagement is key to ensure that Operation Brandberg is sustainable and local opinions are considered:

- Nottingham City Council can provide support via their community protection wardens and ASB officers in pursuit of joint working
- retail premises are invited to monthly meetings to identify prolific individuals who would be suitable to be added to the Operation Brandberg Gallery. This has been set up by police community support officers (PCSO) and shared with the shops in the group after a data sharing agreement was implemented across 16 stores
- health Services supported by the Home Office such as Changing Futures, Clean Slate supported by local government for individuals who have complex needs
- charities such as Nottingham Street Aid were contacted about providing an avenue for public donation in a safe and secure way. They launched an awareness campaign which included posters being put up across the retail park, and a press release by the local inspector

Retail crime group strategy

Operation Brandberg recognised the disengagement between police and retailers, so the following steps were taken to rebuild trust and cooperation:

- canvassed local businesses and their customers to better understand their views of the police and how business encounters with the police could be improved
- established the castle retail crime group, having revealed that disengagement was attributable to negative police interactions. PCSOs have a pivotal role in the success and sustainability of the group
- engaged Nottingham Street Aid to understand their approach for supporting rough sleepers and beggars that resulted in the installation of customer donation points in retail premises
- provided feedback to senior leadership regarding response times and patrols
- established retail data sharing agreements to share the 'nominal gallery' that provided information on prolific shoplifters which was sourced from data analysts and PSCOs
- equipped the castle retail stakeholders with a platform to share their experiences through the organisation of a retail crime group. This group held monthly virtual meetings which enabled shops to share their concerns with each other and the police, aiding in the identification of repeat offenders and providing wellbeing support for those who were repeat victims of retail crime

Interfaces

- SharePoint is used to record the nominal pathway and retail crime groups, allowing easy access, joint working, recording and maintenance. Share point is used for detailing an individual's journey, occurrences and referral status, along with being a central hub for proforma documents
- Niche (an operational database of crime, intelligence and non-crime occurrences) is used to record stages of an individual's journey on the nominal pathway, creating occurrences relating to specific matters and recording flags. Occurrences and flags will be required if the subject has been issued a begging warning, begging summons, Section 35, CPW, CPN, pending CBO or CBO
- The Police National Computer (PNC) is used to record if a subject has a CPW, CPN or CBO, allowing information to be stored and shared in a correct and accessible format
- Changing Futures and Clean Slate are used to refer all subjects who consent to the referral and will be recorded on the nominal pathway

Cost

No extra costs involved. SharePoint was already used. Costing was simply utilising existing roles such as beat managers and PCSO's working in line with their usual aims and objectives specifically relating to engagement of the community.

Overall impact

Out of the 64 individuals targeted as part of this operation:

- 75% were given a first warning
- 33% were given a CPW
- 53% were given a second warning
- 13% given a CPN
- 27% given a third warning
- 6% given a Section 35
- 17% given a CBO
- 14% currently have a CBO in progress

Negative engagement reduced over the monitored period, shown by the decreasing percentages of nominals who had to be given further warnings. This indicates that once an individual has been offered support and sanctioned, they typically do not tend to remain on the nominal pathway – only 14% of nominals had to be given a CBO.

There was a 28% reduction in shoplifting between January 2023 and January 2024 in Castle Retail Park. Operation Brandberg was successful in reducing disjointed work silos and increasing cooperation, which lead to better results.

Other forces have come to visit Nottingham to find out how to deliver Operation Brandberg in their own areas.

Retail crime group review

At the start of Operation Brandberg, members of the Retail Crime Group were asked what three words they would use to describe Castle Retail Park. This was asked to capture the feelings of the stakeholders before the intervention has taken place.

Before Operation Brandberg, they described Castle Retail Park with the words:

- “a war zone”
- “unsafe”
- “dirty”

- “drugs”
- “customers are harassed”

Following the intervention, they described Castle Retail Park with the following words:

- “gold star service”
- “worthwhile”
- “safer”
- “cleaner”
- “quicker response times”

Operation Brandberg has clearly led to retail workers viewing the retail park in a more positive light. The amount of money retailers were losing from shoplifting reduced drastically.

Connections between shop lifting and begging

There is a clear crossover between begging and shop theft subjects indicating they can be involved with both. Comparisons of begging incidents, shop thefts and other crime occurrences demonstrate that an increase in shop theft occurs as begging decreases and vice versa.

When beggars are moved on they can then often be seen turning to shop theft to substitute their lack of income from begging. It was found that when beggars have what may be viewed as a desirable spot, in some cases they have paid for, they are less likely to leave to enter the surrounding stores, which would result in them losing their position and potential income. Therefore, the individuals identified as culpable for one crime are likely to be responsible for the other, meaning a comprehensive approach must be taken to avoid simply displacing beggars into shoplifting and vice-versa.

Learning

It is difficult to tell whether displacement has taken place without tracking the offending patterns and mapping the occurrences involving nominals on the nominal pathway. The shop theft rate has decreased in the area where the Castle Retail Park is located and has increased in the surrounding area, but this does not necessarily mean displacement has taken place. Without tracking which individuals are responsible for the offences the true cause cannot be known.

There were difficulties in the issuing of CPW's and CPN's, as officers sometimes forgot to issue them, didn't have the correct paperwork available or forgot to log that they had issued the orders on the SharePoint. This meant that not all individuals issued with warnings were given the corresponding CPW's and CPN's.

The reliance on a small number of officers and Sergeants poses a risk as if officers were unable to continue with Operation Brandberg then it would likely struggle to progress. The creation of a specialist team focused on delivering Operation Brandberg would be beneficial.

There should be a strong focus on officer ownership, officers should be invested in and held accountable for the success of the nominal pathways in their areas. It was discovered that officers better responded to in-person training, and so several station visits were conducted to help officers understand the necessary processes. However, it was often difficult to convince officers of the operation's benefits, most only supported the operation after they saw the successes the trial had achieved.

Senior leadership support was very important, they pushed for home office involvement and recognised the operation's success at the local problem-solving awards.

The retail crime group proved to be unexpectedly successful as it acted as a support network for retail workers, enabling them to support and advise each other.

There is potential for recently introduced respect orders to be issued in place of other auxiliary protection orders. Respect orders can be used to punish anti-social behaviour more strongly than CBO's and can be issued without attachment to a specific offence, making it easier for officers to target ASB.

Furthermore, the Operation Brandberg strategy could be applied to other types of offences where there is a need to target ASB with auxiliary protection orders.

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