Operation Invert - British Transport Police's response to robberies

Establishing crime investigation department (CID) Grip teams to respond to robberies and knife enabled robberies (KER).

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Reoffending
Topic	Knife and gun crime Robbery Intelligence
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Region	London
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Offenders

Aim

The aim of Operation Invert is to:

- identify high harm offenders at the earliest opportunity by conducting 24-hour fast time reviews
- efficiently use police resources and processes to improve the speed and quality of KER investigations
- prevent escalation of offending by arresting and charging offenders

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Invert are to:

- reduce the number of KER offences by collaborating with the different investigations teams
- increase the arrest rate to ensure that there is a decrease in KER offences and victims
- reduce the workload for the CID investigation team

Description

Operation Invert was launched in September 2024 to support the force with the anticipated seasonal increase in robberies and KER. In response to Operation Invert, the team was initially established through the reallocation and reorganisation of existing CID resources. Recognising that training or recruiting additional detective-trained officers would take time, four contractors were hired to increase the number to four teams. Each team consists of one detective sergeant (DS) and four detective constables (DCs), totalling 20 officers.

The intention is to eventually replace the contractors with detectives. The teams are co-ordinated through an operations sergeant who acts as a single point of contact (SPOC) and reports to the superintendent of operations (Silver Robbery Lead). The restructuring is focused on London based teams, as 90% of robberies and KER occur within this area of BTP's jurisdiction. All funding for this team has come from internal sources.

The officers collaborate with CCTV operators to obtain high quality images of suspects. The transport network has a high number of CCTV cameras. Often these are viewable from the British Transport Police's (BTP's) CCTV control room and all robberies are reported to the CCTV control room as soon as possible. While robbery suspects wear face coverings during the offence the control rooms will track the suspects on trains and across the railway network. The images identify opportunities of further lines of enquires, as they can locate the entry or exit points. Officers can then look for CCTV opportunities outside of the transport network before or after the suspects enter the stations.

These images are then inputted into a system called Operation Streamline, which uses metadata to identify any linked offences and suspects. The teams are tasked to consider an early assessment of threat, risk and harm (TRH). Following this assessment, actions are then assigned, and these are passed from team to team, on the basis of shifts, with the aim of identifying offenders at the earliest opportunity and prevent escalation. This ensures a continuous and accelerated pace of investigation. This contrasts the previous approach, where a single investigator was responsible for all aspects of a case, potentially leading to delays. The teams also work closely with the intelligence team who share the images and can quickly task uniform patrols based on crime patterns and offender details. Once the suspect is identified the case is handed over to the CID teams.

All robberies are reviewed by a detective inspector on a weekly basis to ensure that the crimes are progressed in a timely manner and the priority actions are undertaken quickly.

For repeat offenders of robbery offences, the investigation team may approach the Home Office for tagging information. This facilitates evidence to place them at the scene of the crime and when this is overlapped with CCTV evidence it forms a compelling evidential case.

The Grip teams are also involved in Operation Tread, where they are tasked to visit specific locations for arrests or CCTV inquiries. The teams also conduct hot spot patrols to prevent offending and deter and detect offenders. This process is also supported during the daily management meeting.

Overall impact

There has been a reduction in the number of arrests from 222 arrests (September 2023 to February 2024) compared to 150 compared (September 2024 to February 2025). However, this data reflects

arrests associated with robbery crimes, not individual offenders.

In the dataset for September 2023 to February 2024, there were 45 arrests where the arrest took place outside the date range, making it difficult to compare directly with the September 2024 to February 2025 dataset.

Therefore, a more accurate comparison would be offences and arrests within the same date range. The data is as follows:

- September 2023 to February 2024: 177 crime arrests, approximately 969 total crimes recorded, resulting in a 18% arrest rate
- September 2024 to February 2025: 150 crime arrests, approximately 747 total crimes recorded, resulting in an 20% arrest rate
- there has been a reduction of 222 crimes recorded in the comparable period

The average time from offence to arrest was 18 days in the September 2024 to February 2025 period, compared to 53 days in the September 2023 to February 2024.

Learning

- Specialisation, dedicated teams, and focusing on a single crime type enhances officers' skillsets and overall performance. For example, one officer was able to identify a robbery suspect despite the suspect wearing a face mask and having minimal visible facial features. This was due to the officer's extensive hours spent reviewing CCTV footage of the same suspect's previous offences, allowing them to recognise the individual by their general stature and mannerisms.
- Improvements in processes, particularly the Grip team's method of basing investigations on actions passed from shift to shift, have accelerated the investigation process and the arrest of suspects.
- Collaborating investigative, CCTV, and intelligence teams has resulted in higher detection rates and faster investigations.
- The restructuring of CID to form the Grip, received some resistance and lack of buy-in. The benefits of reduced crime and, consequently, reduced caseloads have taken time to materialise.
- The concept of the Grip team initially included an uplift of two DS and 20 DCs. However, these numbers were never fully realised, and the majority of the team came from existing resources.

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