

Operation Portum – providing safe spaces in retail premises for vulnerable individuals

A national scheme that businesses can sign up to and support, with the objective to collectively increase safe spaces in retail premises.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	City of London Police
Contact	Patrick Holdaway
Email address	patrick.holdaway@cityoflondon.police.uk
Region	London
Partners	Police Business and commerce Community safety partnership Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2023
Scale of initiative	National
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities General public Victims Women

Aim

To enable businesses to provide support and a safe space for vulnerable individuals. This could include children who are lost or simply someone who feels worried or concerned and would like support.

The primary aims of Operation Portum are to:

- widen the reach of the National Retail Crime Steering Group (NRCSG) resources to policing and other retail organisations
- develop the current content held on the British Retail Consortium (BRC) website

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Portum are to:

- improve the safety of vulnerable individuals
- improve awareness to businesses on how to offer support and safe spaces
- increase reporting of incidents of violence and abuse towards retail workers which is a policy priority

- increase awareness and the benefits of partnership working and business crime reduction partnerships
- raise awareness amongst the retail sector of the guidance and support available and increase uptake
- increase traffic to the violence and abuse against shop workers web pages

Description

Due to concerns around the safety of women and girls, there has been a growing interest from businesses to deliver safe space schemes. While there has been an introduction of schemes such as 'ask Ani' in pharmacies, and 'ask for Angela' in licenced premises, accessible initiatives had not spanned across sectors. Where schemes did exist, there was a cost to join and lengthy training sessions which created a barrier, particularly to those sectors who have high staff turnover.

Businesses are ideally placed to offer safe space schemes, as they can be a place where individuals feel comfortable to ask for help. Businesses wanted to be involved and recognised that without a scheme, there was a risk towards their staff. City of London Police sought to provide support for the businesses rather than developing apps or public awareness campaigns.

Operation Portum

City of London Police's National Business Crime Centre (NBCC) consulted with a wide range of businesses to develop a scheme that would be easy to adopt, free to join, and able to provide support to vulnerable individuals.

To set up the scheme the force received £25,000 from the Home Office:

- £1,725 was used to pay for the design of the graphics and some of the supporting literature
- £4,000 was used to develop additional documents and training
- £19,250 was used to manage and run the scheme

The NBCC partnered with Tesco to create a demonstration video of how the scheme worked in practice. Tesco were responsible for the editing and filming, while the Force provided the content. The less three-minute video forms the basis of the staff training and covers how to support vulnerable individuals.

The NBCC has created a dedicated [webpage](#) hosting the following support:

- guidance for managers and senior leaders, outlining what the scheme involves and how it can be adopted
- product guides setting out the aims and ask for different business sectors such as:
 - private security
 - business community – shops, offices and hospitality
 - owners of public spaces – business improvement districts (BIDs) and shopping centres
- poster templates that can be displayed in staff areas with a QR code link to the guidance
- branding guidance with logos that can be freely used
- FAQs and a list of supporters of the scheme
- training notes which can be customised and branded to meet the needs of organisation
- a list of benefits of joining the scheme

Overall impact

The training and awareness have increased the response that businesses can provide to those who approach them seeking support. The feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with more businesses keen to support the initiative.

Impact

- Operation Portum has over 15,000 safe space locations across the United Kingdom
- 19 shopping centres have signed up as champions offering the scheme to a further 6000+ business locations
- a key element of the scheme is the inclusion and support of the private security sector

Many were included anyway in their capacity of providing security services to the retailers and shopping centres. However, the explicit commitment by 13 national private security companies such as Mitie, Bidvest Noonan, and Carlisle Support Services, will see tens of thousands of security officers trained, increasing the reach beyond retail and extending it into other public space locations, such as sports stadiums and transport hubs. The recent addition of the security company ShowSec further extends the scheme into music festivals and concerts.

- 11 national retailers including Tesco, Asda, and Iceland are part of the scheme. The list of national businesses also includes KFC and Cineworld in the hospitality sector
- there is also interest from local councils in adopting the Operation Portum brand and principles as part of a community safety offering
- the scheme continues to grow with other retailers, security companies and shopping centres due to join
- the scheme is also supported by the National Police Chief's Council, Security Industry Authority, and the British Security Industry Association
- a neighbourhood officer in Kent Police worked with the local retailers in Maidstone Town Centre and arranged a training session with them using the NBCC guidance and video. From this, several businesses signed up to become safe spaces.

The NBCC feels that this is a model that could be adopted as an engagement tool across neighbourhoods, creating additional safe spaces and supporting the violence against women and girls mission and neighbourhood policing guarantee.

Learning

- the force continually develop the offering with enhanced and additional training guidance
- there was a request from the businesses for a more structured approach to the training, the force therefore worked with Cineworld and adapted their training to create a slide deck that could be modified for any business
- feedback from supporting businesses has shown that being members of the scheme can allow staff to make a real difference. For example, staff have supported females who had been victims of domestic abuse and sexual exploitation, by engaging with them directly and contacting the police

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