

Operation Soundwood – using public space protection orders (PSPOs) to prevent harassment of female students

A multi-agency partnership approach to ensure women feel safer in public by encouraging reporting and using public space protection orders (PSPOs) to prevent harassment.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Diversion Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Operational policing Violence against women and girls
Organisation	West Yorkshire Police
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Region	North East
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Education Government department Local authority

Key details

Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Offenders

Aim

The aims of Operation Soundwood are to:

- provide an enforcement option outside of the Road Traffic Act, to utilise where evidential thresholds may not be met as a criminal offence
- prevent incidents of anti-social behaviour and harassment
- identify, locate, and arrest offenders
- provide reassurance to members of the public and students at the University of Bradford

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Soundwood are to:

- reduce the number of incidents of harassment
- reduce the use of any vehicle, driver, or passenger from driving or acting in an anti-social manner
- reduce fear by engaging with the public

Description

In 2022, the University of Bradford reported to West Yorkshire Police and Safer Bradford that women were feeling unsafe around campus. In December 2022, the University of Bradford held a “Reclaim the Night” march to highlight this issue. The event was well attended and obtained

significant media attention.

Despite there being significant community concerns, a review of both crime data and intelligence revealed only a small number of reports. To resolve this, a meeting was held with West Yorkshire Police, City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council, and the University of Bradford to identify the scale of the issue and the intelligence gap. The meeting identified that while some women were reluctant to report, others did not know how to report incidents or crime. The partnership was committed to addressing these concerns and develop a plan to:

- improve intelligence recording
- engage with students
- identify offenders
- provide reassurance to students and the public

West Yorkshire Police had a pre-existing web-based intelligence portal which enabled partners to submit intelligence. The University of Bradford security and student union welfare officers received training and access to the portal. This provided students and the university the opportunity to report intelligence directly to West Yorkshire Police. The force's intelligence unit manages the portal.

West Yorkshire Police also undertook a reassurance and engagement exercise which identified cases of harassment at the university's sporting complex during the time of women's sports. A review with the partnership identified that public space protection orders (PSPOs) could be effectively used to address behaviour which has not met the threshold of a crime.

The City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council had already secured a PSPO for the anti-social use of motor vehicles. The conditions included:

- shouting or swearing at, or abusing, threatening, or otherwise intimidating (including by the use of sexual language or making sexual suggestions) another person
- any public nuisance to another person

Following the force's consultation with City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and the University of Bradford, Operation Soundwood was launched. The multi-faceted operation deploys uniform and plain clothed officers to:

- provide an initiative-taking policing footprint by conducting regular patrols

- reassure members of the public and students from Bradford University who visit the city for study, work, residential, shopping or leisure
- demonstrate positive policing to those behaving in an unacceptable manner
- identify, locate and arrest offenders, dealing in a positive manner to secure convictions at court
- prevent the use of any vehicle, driver, or passenger from driving or acting in an anti-social manner

Overall impact

To date, 30 operations have been undertaken and there have been 29 breaches for PSPOs, including:

- nine for antisocial driving
- two for possessing nitrous oxide
- 19 for inappropriate behaviour toward women and girls

Additionally, there have been:

- 28 vehicles seized,
- six people arrested
- 170 traffic offences reported
- 23 section 59 warnings issued
- 22 crime reports recorded
- 41 stop and searches conducted

The impact of Operation Soundwood has been reported through various media channels, including Sky News, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, and Calendar TV.

Learning

- The partnership already had the intelligence portal and a PSPO in place which enabled a straightforward implementation.
- A coordinated media strategy is key to the success of implementation. After an interaction with an offender, an officer posted the traffic stop on Twitter which prompted several media enquiries. This highlighted the importance of an effective briefing of staff on media strategies. A media strategy has now been developed to co-ordinate a press release with the results and impact of Operation Soundwood.
- Several media outlets initially ran reports on undercover officers, which prompted queries from the Central Authority Bureau regarding surveillance authority. This would have been avoided through earlier engagement with media outlets.

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