Operation Zoridon – disruption of handling stolen goods

The focus of Operation Zoridon is to disrupt venues handling stolen goods in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) area using SelectaDNA, a UV-reactive, traceable substance.

First published
15 October 2025

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Retail crime Theft and burglary Intelligence
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Region	London
Partners	Police Business and commerce Government department Local authority
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	February 2025
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Communities Offenders Women Workforce

Aim

Operation Zoridon assesses the impact of policing efforts on theft and venues handling stolen goods (HSG). The operation aims to provide a measurable impact on the frequency of goods being targeted with less fences to sell to.

Intended outcome

- increased detection of offences
- increase in effective use of policing and stakeholder powers
- improved support in place of officers in case on investigations generated from operational activity
- increase in closure orders on premises found to be handling stolen goods
- reduction in venues handling stolen goods
- improved trust and confidence in police from community members
- greater intelligence picture
- improved reporting standards
- improved confidence in reporting and increased reporting

Description

MPS began identifying venues suspected of handling stolen goods by reviewing police indices and mapping locations of interest. One standout venue led to further enquiries, which revealed

connections to other businesses. Retail hotspots were also analysed, to flag and map additional venues through intelligence development techniques.

MPS compiled an analysis pack detailing business hierarchies and proximity to repeat victim stores. Recognising that prolific shoplifters often operate near their origin, officers focused on premises close to known victims and public transport routes. This phase identified around 28 potential venues, though intelligence gaps remained.

This list was refined to 25 suspected premises, which later narrowed to 12 viable targets. Licensing teams were engaged to explore enforcement options under Section 179 of the Licensing Act, allowing constables to verify compliance. Licensing checks, supported by body-worn video and product inspections, helped corroborate intelligence and support warrant applications. These checks were resource-efficient and maintained a cycle of covert and overt engagement.

MPS collaborated with external partners to prepare for warrant execution. Operation Zoridon prioritised respectful engagement and drew on best practices from other forces, including fire safety support for premises closures. Retailers received a "reporting top tips" guide to improve incident reporting. Mapping of venues and repeat victim overlays informed strategic planning.

Drafting warrants was administratively intensive. Once evidence was sufficient, the command team delegated warrant writing to local wards, promoting collaboration and distributing workload.

To overcome challenges in proving goods were stolen, MPS used SelectaDNA, a UV-reactive, traceable substance, to mark commonly stolen items. Around 5,000 items were covertly marked using leftover kits from a previous operation. Officers disguised as staff conducted markings in stockrooms to maintain security. UV pen codes served as a contingency for product identification

Over 100 officers executed warrants across targeted venues. SelectaDNA-marked items and security-tagged goods which were marked under the recommended retail price were found across several venues. Skilled officers led each venue response, supported by bespoke briefing packs containing venue details, price guides, and marking locations. Partner agencies received similar packs and were coordinated from a central point.

Partnership working formed the foundation of Operation Zoridon, both internally and externally. Each partner played a vital role in the operation's success.

Internal partners included:

- local neighbourhood policing teams (NPT): venue checks, intelligence development, and SelectaDNA marking
- licensing teams: guidance and enforcement
- MO3: covert human intelligence source (CHIS) intelligence
- MO2: open-source checks and financial analysis
- language services: translation support
- police dogs: detection of cash, drugs, and weapons
- comms and engagement: social media coordination
- economic crime unit
- LDFIT: CCTV seizure support
- property services

External partners included:

- immigration services: immigration checks and offence identification
- London fire brigade (LFB): fire safety inspections
- HMRC: tax evasion investigations
- trading standards: regulatory compliance checks
- licensing authorities: licensing breach identification
- SelectaDNA Plc: product guidance
- local residents: intelligence contributions
- media: The Sun and ITV News coverage

Phase two

Phase two of Operation Zoridon was conducted in June 2025, building on the success and learnings from Phase One. The MPS coordinated licensing checks across every licensable premises in a designated town centre, totalling sixteen venues.

Over 100 officers were deployed to carry out these checks, supported by key partners including immigration enforcement, trading standards, licensing authorities, and the London fire brigade. SelectaDNA technology was again utilised to trace stolen goods.

Operational outcomes

- 16 full compliance checks completed
- multiple fire safety breaches identified and disposed of
- thousands of pounds worth of goods seized by trading standards
- several licensing breaches recorded
- one arrest made for handling stolen goods and being concerned in the supply of a controlled substance

Overall impact

Enforcement outcomes

Operation Zoridon resulted in the execution of ten warrants and two licensing checks. Stolen goods were recovered at all but one venue, with total seizures valued at approximately £150,000. The operation led to fifteen arrests for a range of offences, including:

- conspiracy to handle stolen goods
- possession of an offensive weapon
- possession of a section five firearm

To assess the effectiveness of Operation Zoridon, MPS analysed three distinct time periods:

Time period A: January – March 2025

During this phase, MPS focused on improving relationships with retailers and encouraging increased reporting to build a more accurate crime picture. Reported shoplifting in Merton increased by 37%, compared to a 7% increase in the South West Basic Command Unit (SW BCU) and a 3% increase across the wider MPS. This rise in reporting reflects improved engagement and trust between retailers and police.

Time period B: March versus June 2025

Following the first major HSG enforcement day in April 2025, MPS compared pre-implementation data (March) with post-operation data (June):

- Merton saw a 43% decrease in reported shoplifting, SW BCU recorded a 16% decrease and overall, the MPS saw a 2% increase

This sharp decline in Merton suggests an immediate impact of targeted enforcement.

Time period C: January – June 2025

To evaluate the overall effect of increased reporting and enforcement:

- Merton experienced a 23% reduction in reported shoplifting, SW BCU saw an 11% decrease, and MPS overall recorded a 5% increase.

Given the initial rise in reporting (Time Period A), the 23% reduction in Merton suggests an even greater decrease in actual shoplifting incidents.

Community and retailer feedback

Retailers and policing colleagues have reported a noticeable increase in trust and confidence following Operation Zoridon. Legitimate businesses have expressed appreciation for the disruption of criminal competitors and the visible police presence.

Media coverage and public perception

Operation Zoridon received extensive media coverage, including national attention. The visibility of the operation and its results have contributed to a broader public understanding of MPS's commitment to tackling retail crime. This aligns with the New Met for London values: raising standards, increasing trust, and reducing crime.

Learning

During the operation, through regular reviews and a robust debrief, the following learning was identified:

- Across the organisation, guidance on s.26 of the Theft Act 1968 was sparse. The Operation Zoridon command team upskilled themselves in utilising the correct language to enable court authorisation. Learning taken from the courts included ensuring specificity in what goods would be searched for.

- It is advisable to contact the courts to see if they can provide a hearing for all warrants on the same day. It is also advisable to seek warrants if there is sufficient intelligence, ideally under Section 8 of PACE. Handling stolen goods is an indictable offence, and search powers should be sought not limited to stolen goods but also ledgers phones and other financial data.
- Establishing early performance metrics ensures clear expectations, establishes accountability, and measures progress towards operational and organisational objectives.
- Improved knowledge sharing – it is advised to develop processes for documenting and disseminating intelligence, allowing officers with little or no prior knowledge to effectively develop intelligence. It also proved useful for the force to offer training around SelectaDNA and provide bespoke packs on the day of enforcement. This level of planning and organisation greatly enhanced the success of the operation.
- The team have had colleagues inside and outside of the force contacting them seeking details around the operation, demonstrating an appetite for work in this field.
- Communication strategy – implementation of clear communication channels to share key messages, progress updates, and outcomes with the public, communicating policing objectives and successes to build public trust and confidence. Having a dedicated liaison officer was greatly effective in co-ordinating operations on the day. The importance of utilising communications and engagement teams to publicise the operation was effective. It was also important to share that SelectaDNA was used and publicise images of products which were found.
- Property – the biggest learning from the operation was around property. The flat-bed lorry used was inadequate, filling up at the first venue. In the future, the force will liaise further with property services around mass seizures. Property services may be able to assist with mobile/temporary property stores for future large-scale operations.

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