

Operation Orion – a problem-solving approach to tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB)

Using a problem-solving approach to work with partnership agencies to address anti-social behaviour (ASB), acquisitive crime and illicit drug use.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Neighbourhood crime Drugs and alcohol offences
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Region	North East

Key details

Partners	Police Business and commerce Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Education Government department Health services Local authority Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	July 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities General public Offenders Victims Women

Aim

Operation Orion aims to:

- monitor the impact that ASB has on the communities of Calderdale
- use a neighbourhood policing approach through proactivity, long-term problem-solving and consistently applying effective enforcement to tackle ASB
- work with partners to identify opportunities to create a safer community

- safeguard vulnerable people, by providing support and pathways to ensure opportunities for future exploitation are minimised
- provide opportunities for long-term sustainable improvements in Calderdale and support local businesses

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce the number of incidents of retail crime in Halifax town centre
- reduce the number of drug-related deaths associated with ASB and exploitation
- increase community confidence and engagement
- disrupt drug-related activity and associated neighbourhood crime in Calderdale

Description

Halifax town centre experienced an increase in acquisitive crime and violence. A review conducted by West Yorkshire Police revealed that these hot spot areas contained individuals with complex needs and drug misuse issues. Since 2021, drug deaths in the hot spot areas have accounted for almost 30% of all drug-related deaths in Calderdale. Existing neighbourhood policing problem-solving methods were insufficient to address the issues.

In response, West Yorkshire Police launched Operation Orion in July 2024, to deliver a range of high-visibility and impact problem-solving tactics with partners agencies. Operation Orion has been approved by the district commander and is overseen by the chief inspector for neighbourhoods and partnerships. The Operation Orion team consists of one sergeant and six police constables, including one secondee from the neighbourhood policing team (NPT).

The Operation Orion team work with:

- Calderdale Council
- community safety partnership
- public health
- integrated care board
- mental health services
- substance misuse and housing charities

The Operation Orion team regularly consult with partner agencies to develop evidence-based approaches for enforcement, prevention and gathering intelligence. The team have worked closely with the council, public health and housing charities to ensure that at-risk tenants can be safely rehoused. Outreach services have worked with the force to address issues of ASB, cuckooing and displacement.

The Operation Orion team are first and foremost NPT officers. They receive the same continued professional development (CPD) opportunities, adhere to the Neighbourhood Policing Strategy and abstraction policy and use the same performance metrics as neighbourhood police officers. To support the implementation of Operation Orion and foster good relationships within the NPT, problem-solving NPT officers are seconded in and out of the team to ensure effective information sharing and collaboration. The Operation Orion team is distinguished from frontline NPT officers by wearing black body armour.

The Operation Orion team conduct regular patrols of Halifax town centre. The team have used a number of tactics including:

- traditional enforcement of offences
- issuing warrants
- closure and partial closure orders under the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014

To prevent the majority of resources being focused on closure orders, a traffic light system has been developed by the team to determine the highest risk premises in terms of closure order breaches.

The development and implementation of Operation Orion has been funded by West Yorkshire Police's NPT budget.

Overall impact

Operation Orion has conducted over 300 arrests since July 2024, of which there have been:

- 119 charges
- 20 out-of-court disposals
- 22 warrants
- 25 arrests for failing to appear

During the previous 12 months:

- thefts from retail premises have decreased by 10.5%
- the number of burglary reports has reduced by 25%
- there has been a 30% reduction on policing demand to serious violence incidents

The use of partial closure orders has ensured that there have been no drug-related deaths in the hot spots.

There has been positive feedback from the business community, members of the public, partners and the vulnerable residents, who have praised the initiative for increasing the feeling of safety in Halifax town centre.

The second phase of the operation will be focused on ASB, neighbourhood crime and illegal off-road bikes.

Learning

- It is essential to consult retail premises who felt that traditional problem-solving methods were not effective in tackling the thefts which blighted their businesses.
- There was initial resistance from other departments about the establishment of the Operation Orion team. To resolve the issue, several discussions were held with departmental leads to gain an improved understanding of the team's role.
- Initially, some partners had concerns about communicating with landlords who were housing people who are considered vulnerable by virtue of their drug use and complex lives. There was a perception that closure orders would increase the number of homeless individuals. The Operation Orion has worked with partners to incorporate compassion, evidence-based tactics, plans and open communication.

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