

Operation Short Circuit – deploying Safer Pod devices to reduce retail crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB)

The placement of Safer Pods, visible, freestanding security and intrusion detection devices, in hot spot areas to prevent instances of retail crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Retail crime Anti-social behaviour
Organisation	Durham Constabulary
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Region	North East
Partners	Police Business and commerce
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	January 2025

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Communities General public Offenders

Aim

Operation Short Circuit aims to deploy Safer Pods (security systems) in retail crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) hot spots to prevent an increase in the demand for officers.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Short Circuit are to reduce the number of retail crime offences and ASB incidents in identified hot spot areas.

Description

Durham Constabulary data revealed an increase in retail crime and ASB incidents within Darlington, resulting in a higher demand on resources from across the force. The data was presented at the force's monthly tactical task co-ordination group, which approved the establishment of Operation Short Circuit. The purpose of Operation Short Circuit was to use a problem-solving approach to reduce the number of retail crime offences and ASB incidents in identified hot spot areas.

Planning process

Darlington neighbourhood policing team (NPT) was responding to a commercial burglary at a construction site and encountered a Safer Pod device. The NPT conducted a review of the Safer Group, who provide the Safer Pod devices, that revealed the devices were being used in the construction industry to prevent burglaries and thefts. A meeting with Safer Group established that

the devices could be used as a visible deterrent for retail crime and ASB hot spots.

The Safer Pods are robust, highly visible, and use lighting and CCTV to make them easily identifiable to the general public. The devices target a 30 metre, 360-degree detection zone that is continually scanned for threats.

A risk assessment on the deployment of the Safer Pods identified issues, including:

- the device being a potential trip hazard
- the collection of CCTV images
- compliance with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA)

Following discussions with the force's legal and information management team, it was decided that the Safer Pods would be deployed, but without the CCTV recording function. The CCTV was also not activated because of the potential for high frequency of activations in busy footfall environments. This would have caused the battery to quickly deplete, compromising the alarm and GPS functions on the device.

The legal and information management team created a retail contract between the force and retailers who agreed to have a Safer Pod device on their premises. The contract details that liability for claims in relation to an injury caused by the Safer Pod would remain with the retailer, as they agreed to have the device on their premises.

The deployment and evaluation of the initiative is being co-ordinated by Durham Constabulary's prevention and problem-solving team.

Trial and implementation

Safer Group and Durham Constabulary agreed on an eight-week trial lease period, with no cost to the force. The trial period was launched in retail premises in hot spot areas. The management of these stores were approached for permission to deploy the Safer Pod within their shop for an eight-week period. Guidelines were provided to stores on where to place the device to ensure maximum visibility.

The Safer Pods have now been deployed to other localities, to test the impact in areas with different demographics, and crime types such as violence against women and girls (VAWG).

Cost

Funding was requested using an existing process between Durham Constabulary's prevention and problem-solving team and Durham Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC). The force requested and received £7,280, which will fund two Safer Pod devices for 12 months. This would allow for deployment, testing, and evaluation in different areas and crime types.

The Safer Pods also include a 24-hour control support team to assist officers and staff with the deployment and management of each device.

Evaluation

An evaluation is planned for September 2026 and will be led by Durham Constabulary's prevention and problem-solving team.

The evaluation will measure the impact of the deployment of the Safer Pod devices on different crime types in urban and rural locations.

Overall impact

The initial two-week trial period had a high success rate on reducing retail crime by 98% and ASB incidents by 85%.

This prompted the widening of Operation Short Circuit to locations outside of Darlington. The subsequent roll-out saw an 81% reduction in retail theft offences at the deployment locations.

There has been positive feedback from businesses who have commented that staff feel safer at work.

Learning

- The partnership working between the force, OPCC, Safer Group and local businesses has been positive and has encouraged other organisations to be involved in the initiative.
- The removal of the CCTV activation has been a challenge because of the concerns from the legal and information management team around RIPA compliance. An additional barrier has been the high battery consumption because of a high frequency of CCTV activations in busy footfall areas.

- Some retailers declined to deploy Safer Pods within their stores as they were evaluating their own security measures. The retailers did not want to introduce an initiative that could compromise the data and subsequent evaluation.
- Deployment in different geographical areas has mixed success. Whilst a high level of reduction has been achieved, initial crime and deprivation levels in the deployment locations could all affect the successfulness of the deployment.

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