

Operation Shopkeeper – using digital evidence to reduce retail crime and support businesses

An operation to target high-harm and prolific shoplifting offenders by encouraging retailers to submit evidence electronically through a secure platform, using a standardised digital theft pack.

First published

21 May 2026

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Acquisitive crime Retail crime Investigation
Organisation	Dorset Police
Contact	Ryan Corbett
Email address	ryan.corbett@dorset.pnn.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Police Business and commerce Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services)
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	October 2023

Key details

Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Communities Offenders Victims Workforce

Aim

The aim of Operation Shopkeeper is to:

- target prolific shoplifters causing harm in the retail community
- deliver high-quality and timely investigations of retail crime
- identify and disrupt prolific and high-harm retail offenders by linking offences across locations
- obtain long-term prevention through partnership working and civil orders where appropriate

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Shopkeeper are to:

- increase the number of positive outcomes for retail crime investigations
- increase the number of identified repeat and travelling retail offenders
- improve retailers' confidence and ability to report retail crime
- reduce the time taken to request and secure evidential material from retailers
- reduce end-to-end postal requisition completion times

Description

Dorset Police launched Operation Shopkeeper in response to the following identified problems in retail crime investigations:

- Each offence was investigated in isolation. Crimes and individual incident reports were not linked, meaning repeat and travelling offenders operating across multiple stores and towns went

undetected.

- Slow and inconsistent evidence collection. Retailers submitted evidence through a manual paper process, causing delays and inconsistent file quality.
- Eroded retailers' confidence. Businesses felt frustrated by the pace and standard of retail crime investigations, which led to under-reporting and reduced intelligence flow.

Planning process

Dorset Police created a 4P (protect, prepare, pursue and prevent) plan to establish force responsibilities, such as the proactive phases of arrest and neighbourhood policing team (NPT) support with civil orders. Operation Shopkeeper is led by the investigation and resolution centre (IRC) and informed by frontline experience of retail crime investigation and partnership feedback from retailers. Early planning focused on identifying system blockages in evidence collection, crime linking and progression.

Roles and teams

The planning and implementation of Operation Shopkeeper involves the:

- IRC
- retail crime team
- NPT
- intelligence team
- Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)
- retailers and business crime partnerships

Implementation

Operation Shopkeeper was initially launched in October 2023 as a force-wide operating model. Early implementation focused on testing digital evidence submissions with selected retailers and refining workflows based on feedback. In September 2025, Dorset Police implemented full digital capability using four interlinked elements.

Digital evidence management system

The NiCE Investigate platform has been implemented by Dorset Police as part of the wider digital evidence capability. Operation Shopkeeper has adapted and configured the platform to support retail crime evidence submission.

Evidence submitted through NiCE Investigate is held securely within police systems for investigation and prosecution purposes, in line with data protection and disclosure obligations. Retailers can report shoplifting on Dorset Police's website where they will receive a secure link to NiCE Investigate. They can then upload different types of evidence, including:

- CCTV footage and still images
- witness statements
- crime scene photos
- supporting documents

The evidence is linked to the crime record, and the system generates a standardised digital theft pack which is accessible to all investigators within a couple of hours.

Standardised digital theft pack

The standardised digital theft pack is delivered via NiCE investigate as part of the evidence request. The request includes:

- an editable PDF theft pack which generates a MG11 witness statement
- a NiCE generated template containing the incident report details
- instructions for returning the completed pack and uploading CCTV evidence

The PDF theft pack contains the:

- offence timeline
- items stolen, descriptions and values
- details and impact from the retail staff and victim
- risk factors such as violence, threats and weapons
- suspect descriptions and vehicle details

The structured template guides the retailer through a series of questions and auto-populates an MG11 witness statement at the end.

Centralised case handling

All Operation Shopkeeper submissions are sent to the retail crime team for:

- early identification
- identification of prolific and travelling offenders
- intelligence-led prioritisation of high-harm cases
- cross-referencing with other forces for county lines offenders

Partnership engagement and feedback

The retail crime team engage with retailers, business improvements districts (BIDs) and the Dorset Safer Business Partnership (DSBP) by outlining the digital evidence process, sharing outcomes and success stories to improve confidence in reporting. The team also engage with retail staff and victims at defined operational points, such as the initial evidence request which is issued within 24 to 48 hours of allocation. If a digital theft pack and/or CCTV is not returned, the team applies a structured follow-up at three and six weeks, using telephone, email and text message to maximise contact.

Targeting methodology and preventive strategy

Operation Shopkeeper uses data-driven intelligence to identify and disrupt prolific, high-harm offenders, delivering long-term community protection through coordinated prosecution and civil intervention. The linked digital submissions reveal repeat and travelling offenders operating across multiple stores and towns. The retail crime team prioritises cases based on:

- offence volume and frequency
- harm indicators such as violence, threats and weapons
- cross-boundary patterns such as county lines and travelling offenders

Once a suspect is identified, incidents are linked in Niche (crime record management system) to create a series. This enables one investigator to progress linked offending to maximise sentencing outcomes.

The NPT work alongside investigators to pursue criminal behaviour orders (CBOs) post-conviction. CBOs impose civil restrictions such as:

- no-entry zones excluding offenders from retail areas
- time-based restrictions such as no entry to the town centre during business hours
- condition breaches triggering further prosecution

This partnership approach ensures high-harm offenders face both immediate custodial consequences and long-term preventive measures that protect retail communities.

Cost and senior management approval

Operation Shopkeeper utilises existing digital infrastructure and staffing. The transition to the NiCE investigative platform formed part of wider force digital capability and did not require dedicated external funding.

The senior leadership team approved the implementation of Operation Shopkeeper, which enabled force-wide adoption and consistent application across local policing areas.

Overall impact

During the first quarter of digital operation from October to December 2025:

- the positive outcome rate averaged over 70% for shoplifting offences compared to the national average of 19%
- average postal requisition time reduced by over 50 days
- multiple custodial sentences were achieved for prolific offenders

Impact on confidence

Retailers have welcomed Operation Shopkeeper, reporting that they feel supported and valued, with staff reassured that reports lead to swift action. Under-reporting has reduced as businesses see tangible outcomes from their evidence submissions. The following feedback has been provided by retailers:

- "The digital theft packs are a massive advancement. Offenders can be identified and held to account within days. This is a huge morale boost for staff and customers."
- "We've been able to combat more offenders a lot quicker, with numerous convicted. The system is quick and easy to use."

Observations

- Investigation efficiency – the evidence reaches investigators within hours, enabling rapid identification and charging decisions. The gap between offence and outcome has reduced by over 50 days when adopting postal requisitions.
- Evidence quality – structured theft packs ensure complete, investigation-ready files the first time, reducing omissions and follow-up delays. CCTV quality and completeness have significantly improved.
- Intelligence – linking submissions has revealed repeat offenders, travelling thieves and patterns that inform targeted enforcement.
- Scalability – the initiative uses existing digital infrastructure, with minimal additional resource.

Learning

- It is essential to engage with retailers at the earliest opportunity to encourage reporting and improving the quality of evidence.
- By standardising digital evidence submissions, the number of reworks and delays to investigations has been reduced.
- It is important to centralise case handling to ensure the early identification of prolific and travelling offenders.
- When transitioning over to the digital submissions process, it is critical to manage force expectations by establishing clear workflows and consistent oversight support.
- Forces who are seeking to replicate the initiative should invest time in retailer engagement, ensure leadership buy-in and embed clear standards from the outset.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.