

Operation Wage – early identification of victims to prevent fraud and cyber-enabled crime

A multi-agency safeguarding approach to tackling fraud and cyber-enabled crime, through the early identification of repeat victims and the integration of fraud prevention activities within neighbourhood policing teams (NPT).

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Community engagement Financial and economic crime Fraud
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Region	North West
Partners	Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Health services Voluntary/not for profit organisation

Key details

Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	November 2024
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Communities General public Victims Workforce

Aim

The aims of Operation Wage are to:

- prevent repeat victimisation among fraud and cybercrime victims
- identify vulnerable victims earlier and provide timely safeguarding interventions
- encourage partnership working and information sharing between agencies that support victims
- embed fraud prevention capability within neighbourhood policing teams (NPT)
- deter offenders from targeting or re-targeting vulnerable individuals

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of Operation Wage are to:

- reduce repeat fraud victimisation
- improve the identification of repeat fraud victims
- reduce the financial losses associated with fraud
- improve victim confidence and reassurance
- improve community awareness of fraud risks
- improve information sharing between partner agencies

Description

Fraud and cyber-enabled crime had become some of the highest-volume crime types affecting Greater Manchester, causing significant financial and emotional harm to residents. A review conducted by Greater Manchester Police (GMP) identified that the greatest harm was not driven by overall crime volume, but originated from the repeat victimisation of vulnerable individuals who were repeatedly targeted by offenders. Reported fraud losses exceeded £70 million annually across Greater Manchester with older adults, socially isolated individuals and other vulnerable victims disproportionately affected. Traditional enforcement opportunities were often limited, highlighting the need for a preventative, safeguarding-focused approach.

Using a problem-oriented policing methodology, GMP undertook further analysis of victims, offenders and system processes. This included:

- repeat victim analysis
- partnership intelligence
- vulnerability assessments
- geographic harm mapping
- application of the problem analysis triangle

The analysis identified weaknesses in:

- the early identification of victims
- safeguarding pathways
- information sharing
- access to practical prevention measures

It also highlighted that responses were often reactive and occurred only after victims had already experienced significant harm.

Implementation

In response, GMP developed Operation Wage as an early intervention and safeguarding programme focused on preventing repeat victimisation. The initiative is led by GMP, with delivery supported by NPTs and the force's Cyber and Economic Crime Awareness Service (CECAS). The following organisations have supported the implementation process:

- Action Fraud
- financial institutions
- Trading Standards
- Adult Social Care
- Age UK
- education providers
- community and voluntary organisations

The purpose of Operation Wage is to identify victims at the earliest opportunity and provide intervention and support within 24 to 48 hours. Victims receive tailored risk assessments, individual safeguarding plans and ongoing support designed to reduce the likelihood of further victimisation. Repeat victims and those assessed as particularly vulnerable are prioritised for enhanced safeguarding activity.

As part of Operation Wage, specialist fraud prevention capability has been integrated into neighbourhood policing structures. CECAS practitioners are embedded within NPTs operating in areas experiencing the highest levels of fraud-related harm. This has:

- improved access to support services
- strengthened local partnerships
- increased intelligence-gathering opportunities
- enabled a more visible and trusted response to fraud within communities

Operation Wage has also adopted a situational crime prevention approach by introducing practical measures designed to reduce opportunities for offenders to re-establish contact with victims. These measures include call-blocking devices, doorbell cameras, home security advice, and personalised fraud prevention support.

To support joined-up safeguarding, a monthly meeting against fraud has been established and includes the following stakeholders:

- GMP
- banks
- Trading Standards
- Adult Social Care

- Age UK
- community organisations

The purpose of these meetings is to share information, coordinated safeguarding activity and ensure victims can access support from the most appropriate agencies.

Alongside targeted safeguarding activity, the operation delivered extensive community education and prevention work through:

- public events
- school programmes
- student awareness campaigns
- volunteer training
- fraud prevention sessions for vulnerable groups

Operation Wage has secured additional funding to expand delivery into further districts and establish a sustainable, neighbourhood-based fraud prevention model. Senior leadership support has been secured through GMP governance arrangements, enabling specialist fraud prevention capability to become embedded within local policing structures.

Overall impact

Operation Wage has demonstrated that repeat victimisation, rather than overall fraud volume, is often the greatest driver of harm. By focusing resources on individuals at the highest risk of being repeatedly targeted, the operation has reduced harm to individuals and communities. This has highlighted the importance of using data and vulnerability assessments to identify victims most in need of safeguarding and intervention.

Early intervention with victims within 24 to 48 hours of identification, combined with personalised safeguarding plans and ongoing support, has reduced opportunities for offenders to re-establish contact and cause further harm. Operation Wage has reinforced the value of prevention and early intervention in reducing long-term demand on policing and partner agencies.

The operation has also demonstrated the effectiveness of neighbourhood-based delivery. Embedding specialist fraud prevention practitioners within NPTs has improved intelligence gathering and enabled prevention activity to be tailored to local needs. Locally delivered safeguarding and prevention work has proved more effective than relying solely on centralised

campaigns.

Learning

- A challenge during implementation was identifying vulnerable victims quickly enough to intervene before further losses occurred. This required improvements in information sharing, referral pathways and partnership coordination. Operation Wage highlighted the importance of clear processes and regular communication between agencies to ensure that emerging risks are identified and managed promptly.
- Operation Wage also found that practical situational crime prevention measures, such as call-blocking devices, doorbell cameras, and personalised fraud prevention advice, can have a positive impact on reducing offender access to vulnerable victims. Combining these practical interventions with safeguarding support delivered better outcomes than awareness-raising alone.
- For organisations seeking to implement a similar approach, the force recommends focusing on repeat victimisation and vulnerability, building strong multi-agency partnerships from the outset, and embedding prevention capability within local policing structures. By addressing the root causes of harm and reducing opportunities for offenders, policing can achieve significant reductions in fraud, improve victim outcomes, and create a sustainable framework for long-term prevention.
- Partnership working has been central to the success of Operation Wage. By bringing together partner and community organisations, the operation has improved information sharing, enabled coordinated safeguarding, and ensured that victims can access the most appropriate support at the right time.

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