



RETAIL RIME

STRATEGY



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for Thames Valley



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FOREWORD

For too long many people have considered shoplifting a victimless crime.

It is not.

Shoplifting, theft, robbery and violence towards staff are unacceptable.

No business should suffer a loss due to criminality, but the impact can go far beyond the immediate financial cost. Repeated offending can make businesses unviable, damaging the wider local economy. Members of the public can be caught up in shoplifting incidents, leading them to either become victims themselves, or to feel unsafe in their communities. Shop staff work in fear of being attacked or suffer assaults and abuse simply for being in the front line of serving the public.

This strategy to tackle business crime, particularly focussing on the retail industry, seeks to redress the balance.

Developed jointly with retailers to understand the challenges faced daily by their staff, we are setting out a clear strategy to support businesses across Thames Valley and tangible actions to bear down on criminals.

Matthew Barber
Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley



OUR PURPOSE

By working together we can tackle retail crime and build confidence amongst businesses, staff and the public.

In April 2023 the Police & Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable jointly published the Crimefighters strategy of which this is an integral part. Improving community policing, tackling acquisitive crime and increasing confidence in the police.

Our objective is to create a hostile environment for those who would commit crimes in our local economy. Whether targeted as individuals or businesses, these crimes have real victims and it is incumbent on all of us - police, retailers and as citizens - to make it clear that these offences will not be tolerated.

Those who commit shoplifting, assault staff or commit other theft offences are often responsible for other crimes and anti-social behaviour.

Many people feel that retail crime has become accepted. We will shift that narrative.



More information about the **Crimefighters** strategy is available at: thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/crimefighters

THE CHALLENGE

In Thames Valley approximately 14,000 shoplifting offences are currently recorded each year. Nevertheless, it is widely accepted that these offences are significantly under reported.

The British Retail Consortium estimates the value of theft offences to the economy at £953 million[†] and a survey by the Association of Convenience Stores suggests there were more than 1.1 million incidents[‡] over the last year.

The scale of the challenge in terms of volume and value is significant, but that in itself can hide the very real impact on people. Retail staff in particular, as well as customers, bear the brunt of these crimes. Staff can be verbally abused, assaulted and often left in fear. This intimidation can destroy lives, careers and impacts on recruitment into an industry which is vital for our whole society.

The vast majority of shop staff say that they have experienced verbal abuse with a third of shoppers saying that they are more anxious of crime when they shop[‡].

Far from being what many may consider to be an opportunistic crime, nearly two-thirds of thieves are repeat offenders[‡]. 65% of retailers report that they believe the number of incidents involving organised crime groups has increased in the last 12 months[‡].

Yet despite this, less than a fifth of retail crime is actually reported to the police[‡].

In order to tackle the offending we first need to rebuild the relationship between the police and businesses. Both have a role to play in detecting, reducing and preventing crime. The lack of reporting means that the police often do not have a full picture of the offences taking place or the necessary intelligence to pursue offenders.

The top three reasons given by retailers for not reporting are[‡]:

- Perceived lack of interest from the police.
- The time taken to file and process reports.
- No confidence the offence will be investigated.

We must break this vicious circle where lack of reporting leads to a lack of action, which in turn further reduces confidence. By setting clear, shared expectations between businesses and the police, and making the process of reporting easier, we can restore the confidence of staff.

Retailers have a role to play alongside the police, not just through improved reporting but by continuing to invest in crime prevention and to support the prosecution of offenders.

We can only tackle the challenge of retail crime through a united partnership between the police and business with a strong message of zero-tolerance.

 **£953M**
STOLEN
each year

41,000
violent
incidents
across the
sector



87%
of staff have
experienced
verbal abuse



63%
are prolific
offenders



1.1m
incidents of
retail crime
annually

ONLY
16%
of retail
crime is
reported



OUR STRATEGY

The six sections within this strategy set out how the police will work jointly with businesses to tackle retail crime.

It is intended that through this work the partnership between law enforcement and the sector will be enhanced in order to deliver tough enforcement, particularly focussed on prolific offenders.

Through the newly established strategic **partnership** we will seek to improve crime **prevention**. Investment in **intelligence** sharing will increase reporting, allowing the police to become more proactive in **enforcement**. Together with other agencies we will work collectively to deliver **justice** and provide **reassurance** for employees, businesses and our communities.

PARTNERSHIP

Working closely with businesses to prevent crime and apprehend offenders. Bringing together a new Thames Valley Strategic Retail Crime Forum and working with existing local Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs), Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and Chambers of Commerce. Setting clear expectations of both business and the police to ensure clarity of purpose.

PREVENTION

A relentless focus on prevention. Providing support and training for businesses, designing out crime and identifying emerging risks. Sharing best practice amongst businesses and looking to disrupt the criminal supply chain to identify where stolen goods end up.

INTELLIGENCE

The sharing of intelligence is vital in apprehending offenders and protecting businesses. We will work together to encourage reporting of crime to identify high volume crime areas and prolific offenders.

Timely intelligence sharing across retail brands and with the police will help to make our high streets a hostile environment for criminals.

ENFORCEMENT

Improving the police response to retail crime is critical to restoring confidence and reducing offending.

Prioritising the response to incidents of violence against staff and improving investigations into retail crime through the creation of a dedicated resource.

JUSTICE

Seeking to maximise charging opportunities by considering the range of criminal offences available. Where criminal charges are not possible, exploring the use of civil orders to tackle repeat offenders and support the local community.

Working with other criminal justice agencies and the government to deliver appropriate punishment and rehabilitation.

REASSURANCE

Increasing the visible presence of police officers and PCSOs in our communities through the Crimefighters strategy.

Supporting local businesses with a dedicated point of contact and improving communication with businesses and the wider community.

HOW WE WILL DELIVER

With thousands of retail businesses spread across three counties, consistent delivery across Thames Valley will be vital to success.

The following areas of activity all fit the strategic priorities set out in this document. Although not exhaustive, they highlight the key actions that need to be taken in order to tackle retail crime in the Thames Valley.

Collectively they represent a step change in the way Thames Valley Police works in partnership with business to act against retail crime.



Governance of this strategy and action plan will be critically important to ensure delivery.

The Thames Valley Strategic Retail Crime Forum will provide an opportunity for businesses to contribute to the wider strategy and to act as a point of escalation for any concerns.

The Police & Crime Commissioner will hold the Force to account on delivering these commitments through the Performance & Accountability mechanism. This will include holding the Force to account in delivering the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC's) Retail Crime Action Plan.

An integral part of Crimefighters

Thames Valley's Retail Crime Strategy links with the wider Crimefighters Strategy that seeks to build confidence by strengthening local policing. Through this wider approach the public and retailers will see more resources in neighbourhood policing and greater visibility.

It is important, therefore, that the Business Crime Portfolio will now come under the Community Policing Command, ensuring clarity of purpose and clear coordination with other areas of community policing.

Additional funding for administration and coordinating staff roles is being made available by the Police & Crime Commissioner and these posts will sit under the command of the Community Policing Superintendent.

PREVENTION

REASSURANCE

Rolling out the Disc app

Intelligence sharing and improving the ease of reporting crime is vital to boosting confidence and allowing the police to effectively investigate. There are pockets of good practice in different areas that sees the use of different technologies to encourage this exchange of information. In order to ensure consistency and increase effectiveness, the Police & Crime Commissioner has entered into a partnership with Disc, a widely used online and mobile-based platform. As a result, the Disc information sharing and reporting app will be available, free of charge, to all businesses in the Thames Valley. The roll out will be phased in order to manage the relationships with Disc schemes that are already in place.

Better data sharing will help to connect businesses with each other and importantly, police officers in neighbourhood teams will also be using the app on a regular basis.

disc Managing
Crime Together

PARTNERSHIP

INTELLIGENCE

Operation Purchase

Operation Purchase is the operational policing response to specific enforcement activity by Thames Valley Police. With a Chief Inspector lead, linked in to the National Business Crime Centre, activity is already underway to create a list of tactical options for police officers.

On top of the work of neighbourhood policing teams and response officers in dealing with crime reports, there will be an expectation of monthly operations in each Local Policing Area, where possible, harnessing the resources of our Special Constabulary.

Through Operation Purchase, patrol plans will be reviewed and retail crime will be part of the regular focus for local officers.

ENFORCEMENT

JUSTICE

Strategic Partnership

A new Thames Valley Strategic Retail Crime Forum will be created. This is not intended to replace the good work that already happens through a variety of local partnerships. It will, however, fill the gap between local activity and strategic oversight, bringing together those existing partnerships alongside senior figures in retail, locally, regionally and nationally to liaise with the police. Chaired by the Police & Crime Commissioner, the Strategic Retail Crime Forum will be the forum for further developing the joint work between police and retailers.

The Strategic Retail Crime Forum will meet regularly to provide strategic direction and communicate with the wider sector.

PARTNERSHIP

INTELLIGENCE

REASSURANCE

Retail Crime Investigation Team

A Business Crime Team will be assembled within the Assessment and Investigation Unit (AIU), consisting of twenty-one police officers, three Investigation Support Officers and led by an Inspector. This team will not just lead on many investigations and identify prolific offenders, but will also be able to develop best practice to share across the Force to other officers dealing with business crime.

Consistent with the wider approach being taken across Thames Valley, if there is insufficient evidence to proceed with an offence then honest feedback will be given to the victim at the earliest opportunity, but the report may still provide intelligence opportunities.

ENFORCEMENT

JUSTICE

Shoplifting packs

When shoplifting offences are reported a "shoplifting pack" is often sent to the business requesting evidence. Essential though these packs are in gathering the information needed for an investigation, the contents and structure of these packs will be reviewed, taking particular account of the views of victims. Whilst much of the information and process may be required in order to maintain the possibility of a successful prosecution, the process of reporting is a significant barrier and so must be simplified as far as possible.

A key part of this review will be to utilise technology as far as possible for the speedy dispatch and completion of these packs, whilst always maintaining a physical back up for those unable to use the technology.

INTELLIGENCE

ENFORCEMENT

Gathering evidence from businesses

Thames Valley Police already utilise a Digital Evidence Management System (DEMS) that allows for the quick transfer and storage of digital evidence such as CCTV footage. Whilst better use can be made of this technology through the improved shoplifting packs, the police must also recognise the significant investment by businesses in their own security. Many large retail companies maintain a central CCTV system, often including their own investigators.

As well as the essential work on the ground with staff in individual stores, new links will be established through the Strategic Retail Crime Forum between security/loss prevention teams to ensure that police officers have speedy access to evidence such as CCTV that is held centrally and benefit from the expertise and intelligence held by retailers.

PARTNERSHIP

PREVENTION

REASSURANCE

Prolific offenders

Improved intelligence sharing through Disc and the creation of the Retail Crime Investigation Team will assist in identifying prolific offenders. It is widely acknowledged that prolific offenders are responsible for the majority of incidents. By tackling this relatively small cohort of criminals, the police can deliver greater successes in protecting businesses and deterring future offending.

Thames Valley Police will actively focus on identifying and prosecuting prolific offenders. Local Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and BIDs will be encouraged to expand the use of local banning orders against known offenders.

Greater use of facial recognition through the Police National Database (PND) will assist in identifying prolific offenders.

INTELLIGENCE

ENFORCEMENT

JUSTICE

Increasing Criminal Behaviour Orders

Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) are designed to tackle the most serious and persistent anti-social individuals where their behaviour has brought them before a criminal court. Thames Valley Police will seek to increase applications for CBOs alongside criminal proceedings. The court can make orders that require the offender to undertake specific activities or to prohibit the offender from certain things. These can be a powerful tool in breaking the cycle of offending and seeking redress for communities.

PREVENTION

JUSTICE

Organised crime

There is increasing evidence that retail crime is often perpetrated by organised crime gangs, sometimes operating internationally. National retailers have, through their own evidence gathering, identified a number of organised crime groups (OCGs) operating within Thames Valley. The police will give a greater focus to these OCGs, making use of resources within the Force and the South East Regional Organised Crime Unit to tackle this significant level of offending.

The Force will work closely with Opal, the National Intelligence Unit for Serious Organised Acquisitive Crime, the Pegasus partnership and the National Business Crime Solution (NBCS).

INTELLIGENCE

ENFORCEMENT

Responding to reports

Responding to reports of crime in progress, particularly those involving violence, is essential. Through the Strategic Retail Crime Forum, clear expectation will be communicated in order to set appropriate and realistic expectations.

Work will be undertaken in the Contact Management team to improve the deployment of officers in responding to reports of retail crime. Priority will be given to incidents where violence has been used, is being threatened or where an offender has been detained.

Attendance will also be appropriate when evidence needs to be secured promptly which can only be done in person, for example, securing forensic evidence.

For those non-urgent incidents not requiring an attendance, robotic automation will improve the timeliness of recording offences and allocating to investigators.

ENFORCEMENT

REASSURANCE

REASSURANCE

Training, support and communication

Support will be provided to retailers through sharing best practice and crime prevention advice. The strength of the new local partnership will also allow the opportunity for more regular briefing by the police to retailers, sharing activity updates and crime trends.

Training should also be provided to assist staff in understanding the law with regards to preventing and intervening in offending. Where possible, this will be done in conjunction with the National Business Crime Centre and the National Police Chiefs' Council.

Communication is vital in ensuring confidence in the police. The Disc app will provide a direct channel of communication for local successes and strategic messages.

PARTNERSHIP

REASSURANCE

JUSTICE

Governance

Ultimate accountability for delivering this strategy will sit with the Chief Constable, overseen by the Police & Crime Commissioner. Principally, this will take place through the public Performance and Accountability meetings, as well as other existing mechanisms. The Police & Crime Commissioner will also monitor delivery against the NPCC's Retail Crime Action Plan which fits with this strategy.

The Force will create a new information dashboard to identify repeat offenders and locations. This will be used operationally as well as to scrutinise operational activity.

Charging and sentencing

The police will always seek charging decisions for the most serious offences where these are a realistic possibility, for example seeking a charge for burglary rather than theft when the circumstances allow.

Whilst sentencing rightly remains a decision for the independent judiciary, the Police & Crime Commissioner will seek to educate all parts of the criminal justice system on the impact of retail crime on victims - whether that be violence or theft offences.

The Police & Crime Commissioner will also lobby for tougher penalties and swifter action through the courts, including a review of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 that sets out a maximum sentence for "low-value shoplifting".

Working together to tackle retail crime



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