

OPERATION ZEAL



SECURITY



Taking a stand against retail crime

A MITIE, CO-OP, & NOTTINGHAMSHIRE POLICE COLLABORATION.



OSPA WINNER 2022

THE CUSTOMER

A true collaboration between Mitie, Co-op and Nottinghamshire Police.

THE CHALLENGE

According to the British Retail Consortium retailers faith in receiving a meaningful police response to retail crime is of concern. According to the British Retail Consortium 2020 Retail Crime survey, 70% of respondents view the police responses to retail crime as 'Poor' or 'very poor'. In the most recent survey in 2021 this had reduced to 60% of respondents who felt the same way. Due to some colleagues perception the under-reporting of crime can occur, this causes less visibility of the number of crimes and issues occurring with the retail environment, meaning the Police are unable to target their resources in the right localities. The Co-op understood the challenges that the Police Service faced and wanted to undertake a collaborative approach with the Police, to make a difference and help to support each other to tackle violence and retail crime.

Whilst initiatives have been previously implemented to tackle the problem, most took the 'boots on the ground' approach, increasing the presence in an area. However, the bigger issue is one of information sharing. Developing stronger connections and relationships between retailers and local police forces will reintroduce trust for colleagues that their reports will be addressed and enables the police to see the true picture of retail crime in their area. With improved intelligence and information sharing, retailers and police together can take a stand against retail crime.

In 2020 the Co-op approached Mitie and Nottinghamshire Police to set about tackling the issue, devising a ground-breaking initiative to combat retail crime in a scalable and effective way, to reduce offences and create a greater feeling of safety among retail colleagues in store.

THE SOLUTION

As part of the Safer Colleagues, Safer Communities values, Co-op were determined to take action. Co-op initially met with the Nottingham Police Crime Commissioner to gather support to address the issue of police response to retail crime. From a retail point of view, they wanted to develop a better way to share their intelligence with the police, followed by a change in the way police respond, to alter the dynamic of how issues were tackled.

Working in collaboration, it was recognised that this could be improved through better use of intelligence, integrating the latest technology and developing relationships between people on the frontline.



mitie

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INTELLIGENCE

Once the key issues were identified, Co-op engaged Mitie. Together, the plan was to identify how intelligence between the Co-op system and police could be shared more effectively, to create a broader picture of retail crime and therefore enable them to take a collaborative approach to tackling incidents.

Together, Co-op and Mitie explored the possibility of utilising Merlin 24/7, Mitie's business intelligence software, to integrate data

from the Co-op's reporting system and create detailed intelligence packs on incidents to better secure police response in future.

In addition, Mitie's Co-op Crime Intelligence Team were on hand to provide intelligence support to the stores throughout the trial and were a vital component of the intelligence analysis needed to identify trends among prolific offenders.

TECHNOLOGY

Merlin 24/7 was a vital component of the solution, aggregating information from multiple sources and providing a single location for Co-op to view information and to provide detailed crime packs to police in an efficient and effective way, enabling police to take action faster as all relevant information was at hand and easily accessible.

In a ground-breaking development, the Merlin 24/7 platform was designed to capture information from each incident report and automatically populate a witness statement. This development ensured information such as Theft Act points to prove and other legal requirements for a successful criminal prosecution are consistently gathered. This saves both the police and retail colleagues considerable time and effort, further enhancing positive action against offenders.

Based on the wealth of data available, Mitie and Co-op determined ideal trial locations, settling on Nottinghamshire. The aim of the trial was to prove the effectiveness of the initiative, whilst also being a solution that could be scaled in the end deployed on a national

basis. Together, a range of stores were chosen, from those with higher levels of crime and stores with similar incidents types. In addition, stores with and without iCCTV were selected to see how the two differed when it came to retail crime (iCCTV is an enhanced CCTV system that is linked to a live monitoring centre, allowing real time intervention and announcements in the event of an incident. The response is determined by a selection of severity buttons pressed by the store.) The chosen trial stores were also all within the same localised areas, to ensure the trial was as manageable and efficient as possible.

Once the best area was chosen, Co-op and Mitie engaged four local neighbourhood policing teams to develop an information sharing agreement. This agreement allowed all parties to share levels of information between one another with the aim of making meaningful and significant change in the approach to tackling retail crime. Providing the police access to Merlin 24/7 was a key component of the solution and required significant input from both Mitie and police IT teams.

PEOPLE

Once the technology was in place, it was vital to develop strong relationships between all parties, as even with the power of Merlin 24/7's automation, human interaction was still crucial in delivering the initiative successfully.

The Co-op Crime Intelligence Team were key to identifying patterns and trends among offences, as well as helping to create detailed crime packs for the police.

As well as the Intelligence Team fostering stronger connections with police, to ensure reporting was quicker and simpler for store colleagues, the police agreed to assign a single point of contact, who could then work internally

with the correct department to follow up on incidents and ensure resolutions.

To make this truly successful, the final piece of the puzzle was to encourage engagement through the store colleagues involved in the trial. The key to changing their perception was evidencing the benefits to them and their customers. To rebuild their faith that action would be taken over reported incidents, presentations were conducted outlining what would happen during the initiative, showing colleagues that when incidents were reported they would receive regular progress updates and the reporting process would be simpler and more efficient, saving them time and allowing them to get back to their core duties in store.



THE RESULT

The industry-leading trial has proven to be highly successful for all parties, evidencing that this approach can have a significant impact on retail crime, but is also a scalable solution if it were to be rolled out into other areas.

Over the trial, the 9 stores involved reported an impressive total crime detection rate of 32.26%. By comparison, the police force average was 15% in the same period. This amazing result highlights the impact that improved intelligence sharing and collaboration can have. By having greater intelligence sharing in a simplified manner, prolific offenders could be more easily identified.

Both police and Co-op systems were cross referenced to build profiles and identify the most prolific offenders based on factors such as violence, determining which ones deserved more focus or should be a higher priority to target.

The new initiative had an almost immediate impact, and across just 9 stores secured 25 prosecutions of prolific offenders in six months, an incredible achievement.

Prosecutions alone were not the only measure taken against prolific offenders, with Nottinghamshire Police, Co-op and Mitie keen to take action that could prevent repeat offences and break the typical crime cycle of repeat offenders, delivering alternative forms of justice while still ensuring that crime came with consequence. For example, one potential measure identified was to place suitable individuals into rehabilitation, as a key component of much repeat retail crime is drug addiction.

Engaging repeat offenders with rehabilitation had the potential to do more than merely arresting and detaining the offender, removing them from criminal activity rather than just pausing it for a short period.



Overall, the initiative has seen a remarkable impact

The initiative not only helped reduce crime by prolific offenders, but also had a profound effect on colleagues in store, providing safer working environments and rebuilding trust in the local police that action would be taken when incidents were reported.

Overall, the initiative has seen a remarkable impact, with a reduction of 35% in violent crimes, from an average of 15 violent crimes per month to under 9.5 per month, as demonstrated in the graph shown.



Our second graph demonstrates the reduction in shoplifting within the stores. It's clear to see the impact of successful prosecutions with a significant reduction in crime rates. The previous five months recorded a total of 636 incidents, whereas during the same time span during the initiative there have only been 435 recorded incidents, an overall reduction of 30% in thefts.

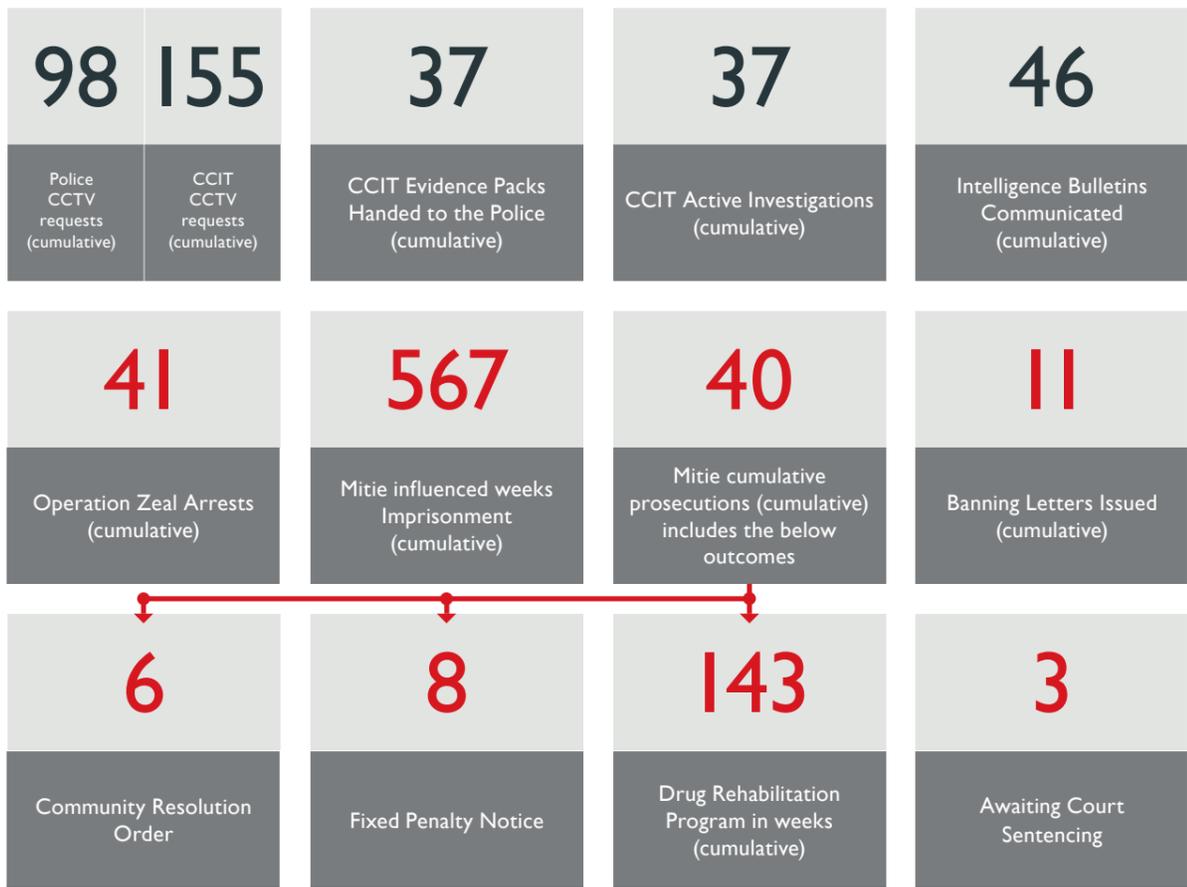


From the first two graphs we can concur that the project has resulted in 30% less crime overall within the selected nine stores, a phenomenal achievement for this truly collaborative project.



In addition, we have measured key areas of the project that further demonstrate the success of the initiative.

OPERATION ZEAL - Project Data



35 Suspects Identified

Retail colleagues have been fully supportive of the initiative due to its incredible impact on tackling violence and retail crime by the most prolific offenders. A store manager from a trial store summarised the positive impact this project has had on their day to day work.

"I've worked at different Co-op stores when there has been lots of shoplifting and abuse and when hearing about Project Zeal I thought 'yes, I've heard about these projects before'. In my current store I was physically assaulted, leaving me on edge to return to work. However, this was before Project Zeal. I can now brush this off my shoulders as I feel I can work freely without fear, feeling safe and comfortable in my environment. I am proud to work for the Co-op and we need to carry on pushing this project forward as it's working. We are now ahead of the game, knowing that any issue I have will instigate the support from Project Zeal."

"When an offender was previously arrested you were lucky to get a letter off court but now the intelligence report keeps you informed of where the case is up to and if the offender has been banned from entering Co-op stores. By sharing this with other stores, everyone is aware of who is causing issues and who is breaking conditions as well as what to do if you see the offender in your store."

"I am more informed of local intelligence, which is shared with the store, and this is shared with other Co-op's. I feel we are all starting to work together, being the police, Mitie and the Co-op, to tackle shoplifting issues. The process has also depersonalised shoplifting between store colleagues and the offender. I now feel I have the backing of the Co-op, the police and security team."

Shaping how we shared information and intelligence really brought the partners together. It felt different to the usual way of layering processes on top of each other. The quick identification of repeat offenders meant those individuals could more easily be banned from stores and charged by the Police."

- Leyton Bell
Solicitor and Legal Counsel - Disputes
Co-operative Group Legal Department

The impact on customers also cannot be overstated. With more prolific offenders prevented from being active in the store, safer shopping environments were created.

Improving colleague police perception

The success of Project Zeal can also be seen in the improved perception of police response and engagement among retail colleagues.

In November 2020, before the project began, we surveyed the selected trial stores.

The results of the survey pre-Project Zeal highlighted a large proportion of colleagues in the trial stores had concerns about being adequately supported by police whilst dealing with threatening behaviour.

In addition, the majority of respondents felt there was insufficient prevention of re-offending from prolific offenders. From these results it was clear there was a need for change.

Towards the end of the project, in April 2021, we ran the same survey across the same stores.

The improvements were clear as after the six month trial period, double the number of colleagues felt supported by the police when dealing with threatening behaviour from offenders.

Furthermore, colleague perception about police response to prolific offenders also significantly improved, jumping an incredible 39 percentage points after the six months.

The initiative has clearly demonstrated a positive impact on colleagues in stores, with significant improvements in their perception to police response and how they are supported in difficult moments.

Overall the project has demonstrated a 20% increase in colleagues positive perception of the support they receive when dealing with prolific offenders, anti-social behaviour and action taken against criminals.



SECURITY



Due to its great success, Project Zeal was recognised at the 2022 Outstanding Security Performance Awards, winning the award for Outstanding Customer Service Initiative.



SECURITY



THE EXCEPTIONAL, EVERY DAY

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