

To: Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel

Subject: Shoplifting - Update

Date: 16 July 2024

Introduction:

1. Retail crime (or shoplifting) is not victimless and can often be accompanied by assaults and threats of violence. It can also result in shop closures and damage public confidence in the police's ability to prevent crime, safeguard shopworkers and target offenders.
2. In light of increases in retail crime, the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) [Retail Crime Action Plan](#) was launched in October 2023 and sets out six key areas of focus:
 - Attendance at the scene - police attendance, as with other crime, to be prioritised based on circumstances.
 - Investigation and reasonable lines of enquiry - all reasonable lines of enquiry to be pursued; CCTV images to be checked against the Police National Database (PND) using facial recognition.
 - Prolific or repeat offenders - identification of those offenders that cause the most harm and development of joint action plans to target offending.
 - Hot spot patrolling - top locations to be identified and patrol plans developed to provide a visible presence.
 - Problem solving - problem-solving plans to be developed for repeat locations and prolific offenders.
 - Response to serious and organised retail crime - a new centrally funded and governed team to support identification of organised crime groups so they can be targeted locally.
3. The PCC is grateful to Kent Police for its assistance with this paper.

Kent context:

4. Whilst recorded retail crime in Kent has experienced increases in line with those seen nationally, the local policing response shows an improving picture with the introduction of the new Neighbourhood Policing Model and improvements to the Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs).
5. The data below shows that compared with April 2021 to March 2022, the number of recorded offences in April 2023 to March 2024 increased by 39% (4,278), but the suspect interviewed rate and solved rate remained stable. Of note, an additional 1,113 suspects were interviewed in April 2023 to March 2024 compared to two years previously, and 1,121 more outcomes achieved.

	Shoplifting Data		
	Apr 2021 to Mar 2022	Apr 2022 to Mar 2023	Apr 2023 to Mar 2024
Recorded crime	10,859	12,704	15,137
Suspect interviewed rate	32%	30%	30%
Solved rate	27%	26%	27%

6. Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) figures also show offences leading to a court appearance increased by 37% in Kent, from 2,234 to 3,070, between the year ending September 2019 and the same period in 2023. In comparison, the number of offences leading to a first court appearance fell by 66% (794 to 271) in Surrey and by 2% (1,471 to 1,441) in Sussex.

Retail Crime Action Plan update:

7. As outlined below, the Retail Crime Action Plan is helping to build on excellent work within the county, supporting retailers through a robust partnership approach.

Attendance at the scene

8. The national plan states that police will respond promptly in the event that an offender has been apprehended (e.g. by store security). Repeat, prolific, or juvenile offenders will be given a higher level of priority. A THRIVE risk assessment (Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability, Engagement) will be conducted for all police attendance.
9. A recent audit carried out in Kent for the month of May 2024 identified that 44% of incidents where a shoplifter was detained actually did not require attendance and were subsequently resolved appropriately (for example low level shoplifting with the store banning the individual after getting the goods back); all remaining incidents were attended by police.

Investigation and reasonable lines of enquiry

10. Links to Kent Police's Digital Asset Management System are distributed which enables efficient quick time uploading of CCTV from stores. The CCTV is viewed, and if the image is suitable, it is uploaded to a localised internal system called "Caught on Camera" where officers can quickly identify suspects. The process also utilises the PND enabling retrospective facial recognition to be used.
11. In May 2024, 532 images sent to 'Caught on Camera' were for retail crime and had sufficient facial features to enable a retrospective facial recognition search. 186 (35%) received a PND facial recognition hit enabling officers to identify a suspect. In 2024 the Home Office are introducing Strategic Facial Matcher (SFM) which is like PND facial recognition but far more advanced. This will assist identify more suspects for retail crime.
12. Where suspects are identified, the report is allocated to Kent Police's Victim Based Crime Teams (VBCTs), with top offenders, locations and repeat victims prioritised.

Prolific or repeat offenders

13. Kent Police are currently participating in a Home Office Persistent Offender Pilot. Kent and Medway have identified a total of 110 offenders who meet the pilot criteria (i.e. suspects of 20 or more offences in the last 12 months + 5 or more cautions or convictions in their lifetime of offending). Kent Police have been able to identify the top 20 retail offenders and by tailoring a problem-solving approach to each individual, has targeted those offenders with 15% now having a Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO) in place. A further 20% are currently in the court process, awaiting a CBO hearing, and have other interventions such as Community Protection Notices.
14. The Integrated Offender Management (IOM) and Anti-Social Behaviour teams regularly look at a range of orders to prevent reoffending. The IOM prolific offenders (different definition to persistent) includes repeat retail crime offenders and are referred into the forces IOM flex or free scheme. If adopted onto IOM via referral, offenders receive partnership IOM support, risk management, intervention and monitoring. The IOM teams also conduct home visits to add further support and work with relevant agencies to rehabilitate offenders and reduce their reoffending and in turn the harm caused to local communities.

Hot spot patrolling

15. The new Neighbourhood Policing Model has provided an excellent means of tackling persistent offenders / hot spots supported by the local Beat Officers and Neighbourhood Taskforces (NTF), while the Child Centred Policing Team (CCPT) presents an excellent opportunity to maximise early intervention with support from the Youth Justice Team.
16. A joint problem-solving approach led by the Beat Officers and Neighbourhood Task Force on each division is essential. NTF's are developing towards being co-located with the Community Safety Partnership's (CSP) and the newly formed Integrated Care Board (ICB) Neighbourhood Hubs wherever possible to strengthen this and the wider partnership problem solving approach.
17. On 13 March 2024, all districts participated in another National Safer Business Action (SaBA) day to show support for local businesses. The objective of SaBA's is to deliver a focused operation with joint patrols, the targeted intervention of offenders and a range of crime prevention activity.

Problem Solving

18. The CCPT and BCRPs are producing a victim based shoplifting video to show the impact on small businesses and employees, with the intention of showing this to officers and staff. They are also exploring other joint initiatives, such as real-life case studies that could be incorporated into educational inputs. Kent Police has helped build a strong business crime reduction community which has helped facilitate the quick introduction of partnership initiatives such as Best Bar None.
19. The BCRP is a partnership-based approach to preventing crime and disorder. Kent has 13 BCRP's covering approximately 35 trading locations across Kent. Schemes are funded by renting radios to individual members; the cost of rental includes partnership membership, radio repairs, license costs, the employment of a scheme coordinator and all other membership benefits. Working with BCRP's is core business for Kent Police and wherever possible officers carry scheme radios which enables them to monitor tension in the night-time economy, attend incidents and communicate with business users. Membership is made up of retailers in the daytime economy and pubs and restaurants in the nighttime economy. One of the main objectives is to prevent crime and violence by deterring thieves or troublemakers.
20. At present BCRP membership is restricted by the ability to communicate with members, this tends to be governed by the radio footprint which unfortunately does not normally extend beyond the scheme's town centre. Coverage does not currently reach rural villages or farms where the fear of crime is high. Kent Police's Business Crime Co-Ordinator has successfully bid for money from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership to pilot a scheme in Tonbridge. This pilot will extend the radio communication to rural areas and enable rural businesses to benefit from membership.

Response to serious and organised Retail Crime

21. Kent Police has an organised crime group Management Unit which is responsible for identifying, mapping, and scoring organised crime groups. In addition, the Serious Crime Directorate Research and Development team have a dedicated officer who is responsible for serious organised acquisitive crime and links into Op Opal and Op Pegasus (national operation targeting retail crime). To date there are no scored organised crime groups around retail crime.
22. In addition, Kent Police has recently targeted retail crime through surge operations which led to positive results, some of which are detailed below:
 - [Three arrested during Folkestone shoplifting operation](#)
 - [Shoplifters arrested during operation in Canterbury](#)
 - [Three more suspects face shoplifting charges as west Kent crackdown continues | Kent Police](#)
 - [Shoplifter responsible for spate of more than 20 thefts in Sheerness | Kent Police](#)

Next steps

23. There are a small number of areas where further development work is required. For example; where offenders are brought into custody, Kent Police utilise drug testing on arrest (DToA). Theft is a 'Trigger Offence' and as such all shoplifters entering custody are tested in line with DToA requirements. Kent Police are 85% compliant in testing those arrested for trigger offences, this has increased from 10% only 2 years ago.
24. However, the tracking of offender attendance at their drug referral meetings following a positive DToA has been inconsistent and so funding has recently been granted from the Home Office / Ministry of Justice to support the use of the Making Time Count app. This provides a good opportunity to address the criminogenic needs of persistent offenders or target where they fail to engage. Use of the app remains in its infancy and further work is required to ensure officers and staff are utilising to its full potential.
25. In addition to drug referrals via DToA, Kent Police utilise Community Treatment Sentence Requirements (CTSR) in the form of Drug Rehabilitation Requirement (DRR), Alcohol Treatment Requirement (ATR) and new Mental Health Treatment Requirements (MHTR). These are being used more and Probation Services are working within Kent to develop and raise awareness of the CSTR's with courts. Kent Police continue to work with courts to encourage the consideration of treatment orders when deciding between custodial sentence or community supported sentence requirements which could assist repeat offenders of shoplifting.

Holding to account

26. One of the principle ways the PCC holds the Chief Constable to account is through the quarterly Performance and Delivery Board.
27. Open to Panel Members and the public on a non-participating basis and also live streamed, the meeting is chaired by the PCC and papers are submitted by the Force in advance and published [here](#). The Chief Constable is required to attend the meeting in order to present and discuss the papers and answer questions about delivery of the [Making Kent Safer](#) Plan and policing generally in the county.
28. The PCC will also continue to hold the Chief Constable to account via their regular weekly briefings which allow discussion of a wide variety of subjects.
29. Supplementing the above, the PCC is in the process of establishing a Retail and Customer Service Board. This will examine Kent Police's performance in tackling shoplifting and violence against those working in public facing customer support roles, as well as ongoing delivery of the Retail Crime Action Plan.
30. Shoplifting is not a victimless crime; it is important that policing recognises the impact it can have on individuals, retailers and communities and takes appropriate action to tackle it.

Recommendation:

31. The Kent and Medway Police and Crime Panel is asked to note this report.