# OPCC Assurance – Business Crime

## Executive Summary

**National Definition of Business crime from College of Policing**
*"Any criminal offence where a business, or person in the course of their employment, and because of that employment, is the victim."*

This definition came into effect from 1 June. The definition only covers crimes against businesses run as a commercial enterprise because the impact of the crime may affect their sustainability as a going concern. Places of worship and public sector organisations are, therefore, excluded from the definition.

The policing minister commissioned the creation of a retail crime action plan which sets out some clear areas of focus and expectations around how individual police forces prioritise and deal with shoplifting.

The Retail Crime Action Plan, which the National Business Crime Centre was heavily involved in drafting, sets out advice for retailers on how to provide the best possible evidence for police to pursue in any case, making clear they should send CCTV footage of the whole incident and an image of the shoplifter via the digital evidence management system as quickly as possible after an offence has been committed.

Where CCTV or other digital images are secured, police will run this through the Police National Database using facial recognition technology to further aid efforts to identify and prosecute offenders – particularly prolific or potentially dangerous individuals.

The action plan outlines how police attendance at the scene for retail crime will be prioritised in circumstances where violence has been used, where a repeat or prolific offender has been detained or where evidence needs to be promptly secured. It also outlines how all reasonable lines of enquiry will be pursued to identify offenders, secure evidence, seek to recover property and ensure witnesses are identified and interviewed.

Within Avon and Somerset, through the leadership of the Business Crime thematic lead, we have created local responsible officers within neighbourhood policing teams, to improve communication between local business communities and the police. As well as this there are more proactive operations, such as working more with businesses to reduce offending through increased awareness and target hardening; but critically also identifying and apprehending the repeat offenders who are usually responsible for the bulk of the offending. We have also had a huge drive to increase trust and confidence and improve reporting, through using our QR code. These activities are part of some new initiatives which are being co-designed with our partners. Each area will co-develop an action plan for their own areas focussing on their local priorities. Finally, each Local Policing Area is producing its own response to the National Action Plan, capturing local activity to drive improvement.

## How assured are we and why?

We are not well assured that we are dealing with Business Crime. Avon and Somerset Police has recently agreed and devised a new strategic plan with partners, which will feed into the local plans. Several initiatives are being trialled with the force which will positively impact on the productivity. However, the force is going through challenges with demand and resources and this is having a huge impact on prioritising retail crime over other demands with higher levels of threat, harm and risk.


Not Well Assured

**Background and Context**
The following crime types are used to identify business crime:
- Theft, Arson and Criminal Damage, Burglary, Robbery, Vehicle Offences, Miscellaneous Crimes Against Society, Public Order Offences, Violence Against The Person, Drug Offences and Possession of Weapons.

- A further breakdown for theft offences (Home Office descriptions): Shoplifting, Other theft, Theft - Making Off Without Payment, Theft by an employee, Theft of mail, Theft from the person, Theft in a dwelling other than from an automatic machine or metre, Theft or unauthorised taking of a pedal cycle, Theft from an automatic machine or metre.

**Conclusion**
There is positive work being done with our partners and A&S have a network of SPOCs supporting local business owners in their area as well as the Force Lead to provide a collaborative two way approach to addressing and reducing business crime. The upward trend in reporting is positive but still is not estimated to cover true levels. When arrest packages are created there is an exceptionally high positive outcome level, we just need to be better at linking offences and gathering initial evidence.

There are other areas for improvement. .Business crime as a thematic may not always be seen as a priority alongside ASC other challenges; such as Vulnerability, DA and RASSO for example, however the link to trust and confidence and overall demand is recognised. Reporting avenues don't enable reporting of crime, attaching of video and completion of statements in one single process. Better reporting would enable better evidence gathering. A small uplift in staff on the volume offences team would enable better linking and targeting of repeat offenders. There are opportunities to create a business crime dashboard which will enable us to better target hotspot areas and prolific offenders. Space can be created within the Local Tasking Meeting process to prioritise and track disruption, arrests and interventions. There are further opportunities to exploit the use of PND facial recognition. We know that our positive outcome rate once we create arrest packages is high, so focusing effort on the "front-end" activity to gather and build evidence could lead to increased volumes of positive outcomes.

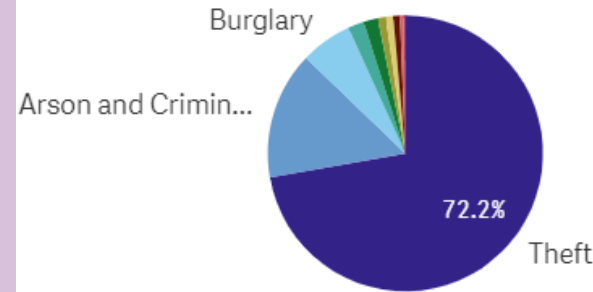**Data showing business crime related offences 01/03/2022 – 29/02/2024.**

**Q: To what extent are we assured we capture data well?**

Total Crimes

**41,144**

% Change Last 12M

**+28.6%** ▲ **+5144** Numeric Change

Current 12M Actual Crimes

**23,144** 18,000 Previous 12M Actual Crimes


Offence Group Breakdown

Burglary
Arson and Crimin...
72.2% Theft


Offence Group Breakdown

49 Other theft
83.4%
46 Shoplifting


Recorded Crime Trend (inc current month)

*Current Position:*

Data shows that in the two years 01/03/2022 – 29/02/2024 business crime accounts for a total of 41,114 crimes. The last 12 months has seen an increase in year on year reporting, from 18,000 offences to 23,144 crimes in the past 12 months. That is an increase of 28.6%.
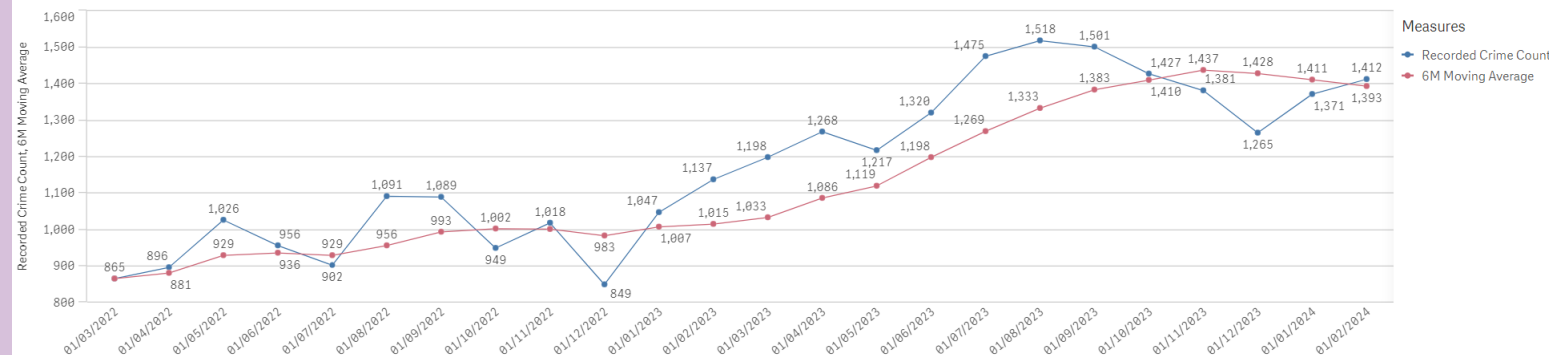
Theft offences account for almost three-quarters of all business crime, and of that figure shoplifting accounts for 83.4%. Making off without payment (often referred to as bilking and mostly comprising failure to pay for fuel) accounts for a further 7.1%.

To illustrate the impact that shoplifting and making off without payment have upon the total force figures, Avon & Somerset recorded a total 56,114 theft related offences in the same period. Business crime theft totalled 29,709 offences, so makes up **52.9%** of all force recorded theft offences.

To further illustrate this point the force recorded a total of 289,391 crimes over those two years, so business crime theft accounts for **10.2%** of the total for all crime.
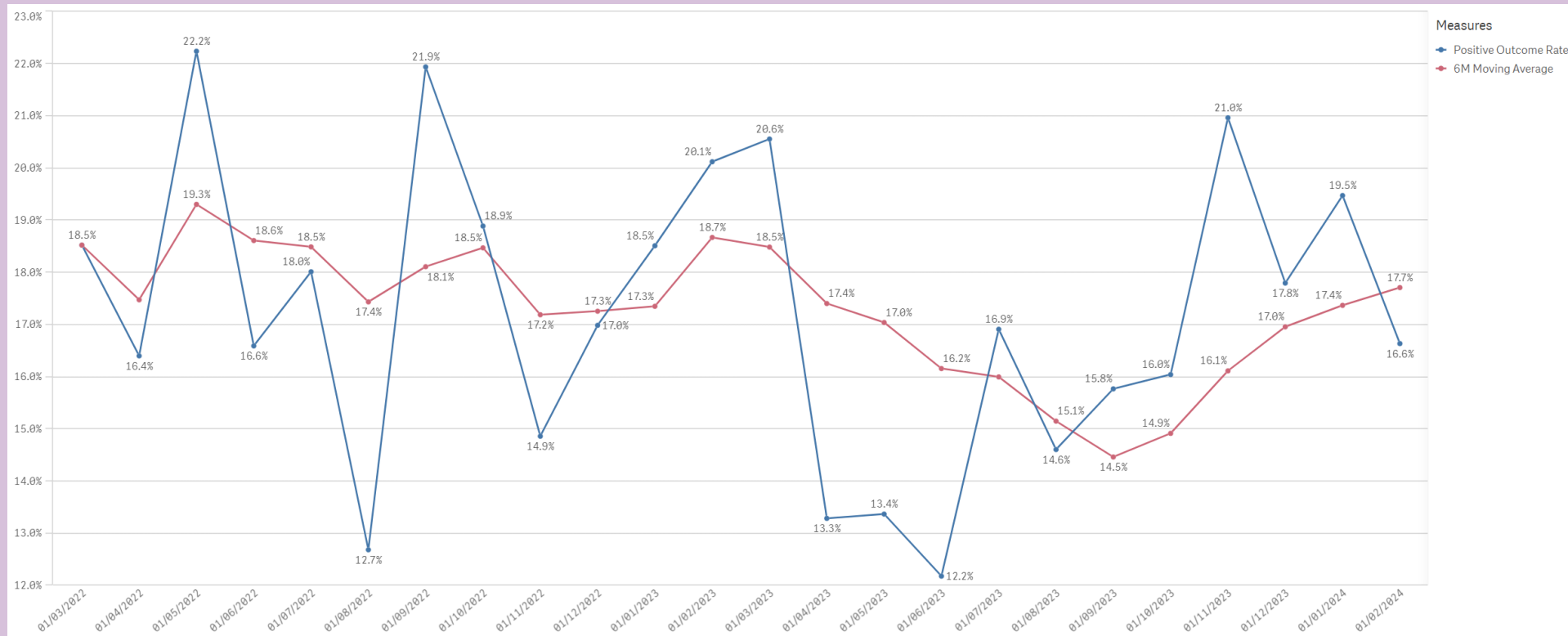
The rise in reported business related theft has been most noticeable from Jan 2023. Since that time there has been a 38% increase in the 6 month moving average.

**Q: To what extent are we assured we identify & target offenders ?**

Positive outcome rate for shoplifting



The force has a positive outcome rate of 16.4% for shoplifting over the last year, this is a small decrease on two years ago.

A&S is ranked 34th nationally for outcome rate.

A&S is ranked 33rd for offences per 1,000 population.

In order to understand how we identify and target prolific offenders we need to understand the process for reporting business crime. Call script processes and advice on the public website will take victims of business crime through a threat, harm, risk process. If the offender has been detained then Patrol will be tasked to attend and deal in the most appropriate fashion.

If an offender has not been detained or serious harm not caused, victims are directed towards the online reporting form.  This form is completed by the victim.  As no niche number has been assigned at this point, it is not possible to submit a report and upload CCTV at the same time.  The initial report is assessed by the enquiry office and a niche occurrence is created.  Templates generate automated email responses based upon whether a suspect is named or not, and whether CCTV is available.  Victims are advised of the niche reference and told to upload CCTV at www.avonandsomerset.police.uk/cctv. The wording of this email might be confusing to some, as it describes different procedures depending upon whether a suspect is named, can be identified or not. In order to improve the investigation of shoplifting the IAU have created a Volume Offender Team (VOT).  This sits within IAU and consists of 5 Police Staff Investigators. Abstractions are back-filled wherever possible.  Reports that are of low value with no named suspect nor any CCTV are filed.  All others are tasked to VOT.

| Number of shop theft occurrences handled & filed by VOT Jan - Dec 23 | 1270 |
|---|---|
| Number of requests for CCTV evidence | 1140 |
| Number of positive uploads of CCTV | 521 |
| Number of statements supplied | 52 |

| Number of named suspect shop theft occurrences filed by VOT in Dec 2023 | 178 |
|---|---|
| Number of requests for CCTV evidence | 164 |
| Number of positive uploads of CCTV | 89 |
| Number of statements supplied | 9 |

Case 1, £300 theft, caught on video and reported online on 2nd Nov.

Enquiry Office reviewed the report the same day, task sent to IAU

Occurrence allocated 3 days later to Volume Offences Team.  Request made the same day for store CCTV.  Noted on OEL that offender has 6 pending cases at court, but crime if filed pending receipt of CCTV.

10th Nov - IOM request that the crime is reopened.  Phone contact made with store, not aware of original email requesting CCTV.

20th Nov - task sent to local NH team for cctv collection

24th Nov - suspect is in custody on a different matter, this is noted on the OEL & that there are 13 similar offences outstanding (including this one). NO ACTION TAKES PLACE WITH REGARDS TO THIS OFFENCE.

6th Dec - now outside the 28 day deadline for CCTV collection, an email chaser is sent to NH.

16th Feb - PCSO advised they had been on sick / restricted duties & CCTV had been deleted.

Case 2, reported online & sent to VOT on 3rd Nov. Links to several crimes noted

Email sent to central CCTV and to store.  CCTV sent electronically the next day.

Email sent to store requesting statement & received the next day.  Within 5 days of receipt the OIC had obtained CCTV and a statement, and prepared a handover pack should the suspect

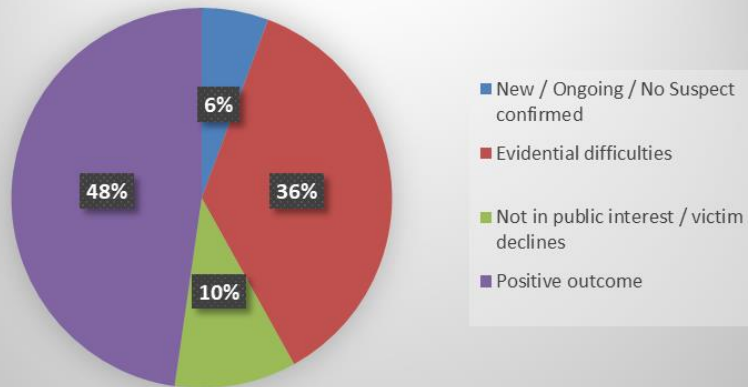24th Nov - suspect in custody, dealt with and positive outcome applied.

**Q: To what extent do we understand and target prolific offenders?**

The VOT filed 1270 shoplifting and making off without payment crimes in 2023.  Experience has shown that the return rate for CCTV is subject to many variables. The National Retail Crime Plan is quite clear with regards to expectations placed upon businesses to supply CCTV and statements upon request but many stores limit access to CCTV to restricted personnel, or utilise third-party security companies to manage systems.  Requests for CCTV are often ignored or mislaid.  DATA.  Due to these issues, and a lack of time / resource to "chase up" CCTV requests, the crime is filed pending receipt.  If CCTV is returned the team will assess whether it is of evidential value and can be definitively linked to the named suspect.  If so an email will be sent back to the victim requesting a statement.   As can be seen in the two tables there are diminishing rates of return at each stage of the process – for the period sampled, 50% of CCTv requested was not supplied, and following on from that statements were not supplied 90% of the time.  Something in that process is not landing with victims and potential opportunities to gather evidence are being lost.  If an identity is not known there are two staff within the VOT and 6 staff within Intel that are trained to process images against the facial recognition software within PND, and if that doesn't secure any identification then there are processes within niche to enable images to be uploaded to the "ID Sought" section of the Intelligence Portal.

If a suspect has been named, CCTV secured and of evidential value and a statement obtained then VOT will task Patrol with an arrest package.  In the past 12 months the VOT have passed 822 crimes to LPA, with just under 200 offenders linked to those crimes.  As of February 2024 there are 285 open shoplifting occurrences with a suspect named.  Dip-sampling has been conducted and what is apparent is that there is a lack of consistency and perhaps oversight applied to shoplifting which is leading to missed opportunities to detect offences.  The tables to the left detail two similar offences of shoplifting, both reported online within a few hours of each other, with the **same named suspect**. On the first occasion (red) enquiries were delayed, and there was little consideration of the fact that the suspect had been linked to multiple offences.  Emails and tasks were not chased up and worryingly no action took place when the suspect was actually in custody.  No record of consideration for an interview with a view to a possible TIC was even recorded. Compare this to the second job (green) where the right things were done at the right time, and the difference is obvious.  An arrest pack was ready, the job was properly linked to the suspect, so when he was arrested on the different matter this job could be proceeded with and resulted in a charge.

# PQA: How good is the Force's service to victims of crime?

## OPCC Assurance – Business Crime

**Lead: C/Insp Ronnie Lungu**



Top 25 prolific suspects - disposals

- New / Ongoing / No Suspect confirmed — 6%
- Evidential difficulties — 36%
- Not in public interest / victim declines — 10%
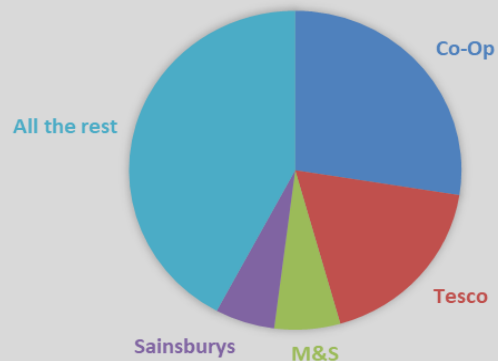- Positive outcome — 48%

| 10: Police - formal action not in public interest |
| 16: Victim declines/withdraws support - named suspect identified |
| 21: Police - named suspect, investigation not in the public interest |



Stores reporting prolific suspects

- Co-Op
- Tesco
- M&S
- Sainsburys
- All the rest

**Q: To what extent do we understand and target prolific offenders?**

Nationally a number of retailers have collaborated to fund a dedicated resource to focus upon serious and organised crime groups targeting shops. This work is channelled through Opal under Op Pegasus. As a force, business crime and organised acquisitive crime is not currently one of our strategic priorities and as such the Intelligence Department is unlikely to be able to support detailed intelligence analysis or to conduct proactive development to identify prolific organised shoplifter gangs. Currently the strategic priorities are County Lines & Drugs Markets, Serious Violence, Modern Slavery & Human Trafficking and Child Sexual Abuse & Exploitation. Priorities are set at a force Strategic Tasking & Coordination Group meeting following completion of the strategic assessment. The latest strategic assessment has just been completed and new priorities will be decided in March at the Strategic Planning Meeting.

Every one of the 50,000 intelligence reports we receive each year is assessed against a THRIVE-P matrix (for Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigative Opportunities, Expectations and Priorities) and graded as either Red, Amber or Green by the processing team. Red intelligence is reviewed immediately by the duty Sergeant, Amber intelligence is marked for consideration of development by one of the intelligence team and Green intelligence is not usually subject to a response. Most shoplifting intelligence will be graded as GREEN, although if the intelligence indicates the existence of organised crime or relates to a specific future event it may be graded as AMBER. In the last 12 months the intelligence department received 223 intel reports which are categorised as Theft/Shops & Stalls, and 230 categorised as Theft/Handling & dealers. These reports are readily available for local policing teams to interrogate via the Crime & Intelligence App on Qlik and give the top linked people, locations etc. There's no specific current feed through Op Pegasus that the intel department are aware of.

Using Qlik data it is possible to see that the Top 25 Repeat Offenders for theft (shop) over the past 12 months have been linked to a total of 811 occurrences as suspects. Of those, 387 (47.7%) have a positive outcome. Further work exploring those occurrences that do not have a positive outcome reveals that 43 are either new or don't have any outcome applied. CPS or Police evidential difficulties account for 294 (36%). That leaves 84 where outcomes 10, 16 or 21 have been applied. This may be worthy of further scrutiny. These figures relate to our most prolific offenders, often targeting stores on multiple occasions. The suspect is often named by the store, so one may question why, having reported the matter and supplied the evidence, stores then decide not to prosecute or a decision is made that further action is not in the public interest.

Interestingly of those stores targeted by the Top 25 Repeat Offenders, Co-Op & Co-Op Southern stores account for 274 (33.7%) and Tesco / Tesco Express account for 147 (18.1%). The next largest are Marks & Spencer with 52 (6.4%), so one may question why Co-Op and Tesco are such outliers? This pattern is pretty much repeated for all victims of shop theft with Tesco highest at 13.8%, Co-Op very close with 13.7% and the third highest at just 5.7%. It would be useful to understand whether this is due to reporting processes at the two chains being stricter, or whether there is some flaw that makes them seem to be an easier target. The Volume Offender Team have strong links with Co-Op, and there is a willingness to work collaboratively to prevent and detect more offences.

**Q: To what extent do we use established good practice to inform our approach to business crime?**

We use the College of Policing APP guidance with investigating business crime, supplemented by our local initiatives and practices. A new Business Crime Strategy is in the process of being developed with an aim to complete it by the end of March 2024. The strategy will link closely to the Retail Crime Action Plan.

There are neighbourhood team Single Points of Contact (SPOCs) within each area. Each area is in the process of developing a local improvement plan which varies to accommodate the needs of the local businesses. This network of SPOCs provide a local picture, plan and provide the link to the Force Lead. SPOCs lead on local initiatives, using their local knowledge and experience to tailor plans. Each team works with the local businesses to encourage collaborative working within the Business Improvement Districts (BID) in the larger cities, holding regular meetings to strengthen these relationships.

NHTs work closely with the VOT. NHT are the first point of contact for desktop investigators within IAU to call upon to go to the stores and secure the evidence in urgent cases. Some areas, such as Bristol and Bath, focus on the top 5 prolific offenders proactively through NH days of action. South Gloucestershire identify their top 3 offenders at each LTM. Decisions are then made on ownership and how to target. A new shoplifting pack has been developed for retailers – this provides them with a detailed explanation of the process, and reaffirms our commitment to tackling shoplifting. The pack is due to start formal trialling with Bristol Neighbourhood Team imminently. In the longer term, IAU are hoping to incorporate the current VOT (shoplifting process) and the IAU support team (who manage the ID Sought process and CCTV uploads) into a dedicated shoplifting team. This will be dependent on the availability of resources following the current CDI uplift.

Neighbourhood Teams actively work with ASB Coordinators to explore the use of legal orders such as Criminal Behaviour Orders, Civil Injunctions and Serious Crime Prevention Orders to disrupt and manage prolific business crime offenders. Due to the nature of current data recording we cannot isolate those orders applied as a result of business crime. We do know that ancillary tools such as Community Protection Warnings (CPWs) and Community Protection Notices (CPNs) have also been used to great effect to positively affect the behaviour of prolific offenders, e.g a prolific offender had previously been convicted many times for shoplifting and had various penalties in the past including a 3 week imprisonment but had continued upon his release. He was subsequently the recipient of a CBO. He was charged with shoplifting but also several breaches of the order. The sentence was a 30 week prison term.

Most neighbourhood teams collaborate closely with local Business Improvement Districts and often share equipment, such as "Shopnet" radio so PCSOs and Police on the beat team hear first hand when a crime is occurring and can attend straight away as they are on the ground. Problem Solving is currently subject to force improvement activity in response to the HMICFRS Area for Improvement. It has been used as a tool to tackle high levels of ASB and street crime affecting businesses (and the wider community) such as the one for Glastonbury High Street. As a result, reported crime fell by 25% and incidents of ASB fell by 17% in the 12 months period.

QR codes have been introduced and embedded Forcewide via a business crime advice leaflet. This provides a quick and easy way to upload CCTV, reports and how to contact Police. These have been welcomed by the businesses and feedback is generally positive (more detail is provided on the next slide). There are also fact sheets with suggestions on how to keep the store safe which have been distributed across the main areas of concern. We are linked with the Crime prevention team, who are currently in the process of making a funding BID, Safer Shops funding via the West of England Combined Authority (WECA) and the WECA Mayor.

Neighbourhoods have created an action plan to drive better performance with regards to problem solving. In terms of business crime, there are 2 live plans regarding begging affecting businesses, 1 aimed at reducing shoplifting and ASB in a supermarket and one aimed at targeting the offending behaviour of a prolific shoplifter.

# PQA: How good is the Force's service to victims of crime?
## OPCC Assurance – Business Crime

**Lead: C/Insp Ronnie Lungu**

**Q: To what extent do we use established good practice to inform our approach to business crime?**

| Key Identified Risks | Mitigating / proposed activities |
|---|---|
| **There have been missed opportunities to target and enforce against prolific shop theft offenders** | ❏ **Increased focus on offenders** – opportunity to focus on the "power few" via Local Tasking Meeting processes, creating intelligence packs and trigger plans. Days of action planned for March.<br><br>❏ **Serious Organised Retail Crime (SORC)** – bring this into the broader serious organised crime agenda.<br><br>❏ **Further development of PND facial recognition** – potential to equip more staff and improve processes to identify more offenders<br><br>❏ **Uplift in VOT** – success has been had with a dedicated resource looking at volume crime but gaps still exist. The process is effective at creating quality arrest packages leading to positive outcomes. |
| **Problem solving has not been utilised to full effect to tackle the problems of business crime.** | ❏ **Increased focus on problem solving** – opportunity to target hotspot locations, repeat victims, prolific offenders through more effective use of problem solving.<br><br>❏ **Ongoing training for NH** – new NH Craft sessions, induction processes and creation of an online learning platform will enable better knowledge and utilisation of problem solving and ASB powers & tools to tackle business crime. |
| **Business crime data is available but located across several Qlik sheets and there is no single dashboard to properly understand the issues. Police data is not easily shared with business partners.** | ❏ **Creation of a business crime dashboard** – better understand and utilise data to identify and target hotspot areas and prolific offenders.<br><br>❏ **Production of a local Data Sharing Agreement (DSA)** – working with Co op stores to share intelligence, there is a DSA already in existence with NBCC at national level. |
| **Victims of business crime do not have confidence in reporting and there is a diminishing rate of return at each stage of the process with regards to supply of CCTV and Statements** | ❏ **Continue to raise retailer awareness** – focus upon reporting mechanisms, evidence requirements and use of business impact statements. Days of action planned for March focussing on engagement and prolific offenders. Working with key retailers to tackle business factors affecting evidence gathering, e.g. staff access to CCTV, staff time to report.<br><br>❏ **Review of reporting mechanisms** – look at opportunities to reduce "touchpoints" and "back & forth" between reporting a crime, upload of CCTV and request for statement. Shoplifting pack being trialled in Bristol. |