



**Project Name:** Reducing theft from elderly victims in shopping areas

**Location:** Southport, Merseyside, United Kingdom.



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## **Scan**

During 2009 an increase in reports of theft from the person was identified within Southport Town Centre.

Southport is a Victorian seaside resort that is considered to be a safe and desirable place to visit. The local economy is based on tourism with between 15,000 and 60,000 visitors per day. Both the Tourist Department and local retailers were keen to ensure any response did not impact upon the reputation of the town.

Previous operations to address thefts from the person had been offender based with a short-term impact.

In August 2009 the local community set reducing thefts from the person as the policing priority for the Neighbourhood Policing Team.

## **Analysis**

An analysis of crimes and lost property reports occurring between 1<sup>st</sup> January and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 identified two hotspot areas at either end of the main shopping boulevard.

Applying the problem analysis triangle enabled the identification of the contributing factors and the appropriate managers, handlers and guardians.

All the victims were female. The average age was 74 years old. The offences were located at or near charity shops and café's and took place at the weekend.

Two different methods were used and this suggested two separate offenders or teams. Offence times indicated a link to drug and alcohol users.

The layout of stores, working patterns and the perceptions of retail staff appeared to contribute to creating an environment that enabled offences to take place.

The problem analysis triangle highlighted many factors to indicate a high potential for displacement into other areas of the town.

## **Response**

The analysis identified seven key activities. The activities were:

1. Training for tourism and store staff to recognise and address crime risks.
2. Educating visitors and residents to reduce their risk of victimisation
3. Target Hardening
4. Press strategy
5. Alley gating key locations
6. Provision of drug substitutes
7. Shop Design

### **Assessment**

The overall level of crimes reduced substantially with no displacement to surrounding areas. The age profile changed indicating elderly victims were no longer targeted. The changes to the location are permanent and, in addition to reducing the risk to the elderly, benefit the night-time economy.

No displacement of offences occurred but the surrounding area felt the benefits. An independent survey recorded an increase in confidence and satisfaction with the victim profile compared to all local residents.

In conclusion, the project successfully addressed the causes of theft against elderly victims.

## **SCANNING**

During 2009 an increase in reports of theft from the person was identified within Southport Town Centre. The Police initially identified the increase during the daily quality assurance of recorded crime and from postings on local media websites. The local business community reported increased reports of lost property and thefts from shoppers to the Town Centre manager. The Homewatch co-ordinator reported Homewatch groups feeling less safe in Southport due to handbag thefts.

### **History**

Southport is a Victorian seaside tourist resort located within the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton. The resort lies on the coast of the Irish Sea at the north end of Sefton. Traditionally the area has a very low overall crime rate and is considered to be a safe and desirable place to live or work. The town centre population is 12,407 with 44.1% over the age of 55 compared to 32.1% across Sefton. The majority of town centre residents are within the Higher Managerial and Supervisory/Junior Managerial social groups.

The local economy based upon day visitors, short breaks, and conferences. There are 276 shops, 39 hotels, 73 restaurants, a funfair, swimming pool, two theatres, amusement arcades and the second longest pier in the UK. An extensive programme of events takes place throughout the year attracting many visitors. The town has good transport links with five trains, from Manchester and Liverpool, per hour bringing approximately 150-200 passengers per train. There is parking for 4400 cars and regular bus services to Liverpool and Preston. Visitor numbers range from 15,000 per day weekday/winter to 40,000 during a busy summer weekend and up to 60,000 on a Bank Holiday. The main shopping area is Lord Street, a 600m tree lined boulevard, featuring a Victorian cast iron and glass-topped canopy. The public perception of Southport as a safe place and the large number of visitors provided a tempting location for offenders.

During 2009, 4800 coaches brought 230,000 visitors to the town, each spending an average of £31. Although the Conference Centre was closed for a major refurbishment for most of the year, 15,000 delegates attended conferences in 2009, each spending an average of £461. Sefton Tourism and Sefton Business Enterprise, who represent retailers and local businesses, were keen to ensure that any response did not adversely affect the image of the resort.

Public perceptions and the large number of visitors to the town have historically created opportunities for offenders either singly or in teams. There are examples within recent years of teams committing multiple offences in one day or individuals engaging in a series of offences spread over a longer period. The response has been offender based and largely the responsibility of the police.

In 2008 a small partnership project to use 'Chelsea clips', a hardened plastic clip fixed to the underside of café tables for patrons to hang handbags on delivered limited success. The analysis suggested that project was too small to have sufficient impact to affect crime rates.

Sefton CDRP has implemented a local Community Safety Area Partnership that is responsible for co-ordinating and assessing activity to address National Indicator's. The partnership includes all the statutory crime & disorder partners, councillors, tourism; drugs support services, local business representation and community representation. An analysis team, with access to all partner's data, provides support. Sefton CDRP has commissioned IPSOS MORI to produce a 'tracker' survey to measure confidence and satisfaction at electoral ward level. Between January 2009 and May 2009 confidence within the "over 55's" within the Southport had fallen by 40%, compared to an increase for all other groups.

In August 2009 the analysis was presented to the public at the Priority Setting public meeting. The Community expressed concerns over the age of the victims, the impact upon the image of the town and the potential to adversely affect the quality of life for victims. The community set "Reducing theft from person and improving confidence amongst victims" as the priority for the Neighbourhood Policing Team.

A single Neighbourhood team polices Southport Town Centre. The team consists of one Sergeant, four Constables and nine Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) led by an Inspector. Throughout 2009 Police resources were deployed to a serious crime investigation within Sefton, as a consequence no additional resources were available to the Neighbourhood team. The Neighbourhood team took the lead to develop a response on behalf of the partnership.

## **ANALYSIS**

An analysis of crimes occurring between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2009 identified 15 offences. The average age of the victim was 74 years old. The oldest was 91 and the youngest 38. All the victims were female. Offences were equally split between residents and visitors. No offences occurred on

Sunday, Monday or Tuesday. The offences were located at or near charity shops and café's.

In light of the sample size, victim perceptions and the requirement for additional verifiable information when recording crimes, as set out in the Home Office Counting Rules, the crime analysis was supplemented by an analysis of lost property reports. During the same period 21 purses had been reported lost. The reporting person was contacted and the details of the last three shops visited were obtained. Initially the analysis methodology attempted to ascribe probabilities to location using a points system. This was unworkable and quickly superseded by a straightforward count. The age, location and time profile was similar to the theft profile but with additional locations being identified.

### **Problem Analysis Triangle**

By applying the problem analysis triangle we were able to identify contributing factors and appropriate managers, handlers and guardians

### **Victim**

The average age of the victims was 74. With the exception of one victim, all were over 52 years of age. The oldest victim was 91 years old. There was no differentiation between visitors and residents. All victims were female. An analysis of the method used by offenders identified two:

1. At the north end of Lord Street offenders would steal from a shoulder bag or shopping bag after the victim was jostled in a crowded shop.
2. At the south end of Lord Street offenders would steal from an unattended shopping trolley or basket whilst the victim was distracted.

In each case only the purse was taken. Victims frequently reported more attractive items, such as mobile phones, and recent purchases being left. None of the purses were recovered and none of the stolen credit cards were used in fraud offences. However this may be a direct result of the Merseyside Police policy of supplying details of cancellation procedures to victims and the Neighbourhood staff contacting victims within 24 hours to confirm cards had been cancelled.

Both methods required the purse to be either on display or easily accessible by the offender. Both the Police and the Partnership had invested significant resources over a period of years targeting victims with crime reduction advice and it appeared to have been ineffective. To refine the analysis and confirm

the applicability of the findings of earlier research (Glensor & Peak, 2004) PCSO's were tasked to look for individuals matching the victim profile with a purse on open display and ask if they knew the crime reduction message and why they had left their purse on display. The results indicated that most individuals knew the crime reduction message but their perception was that Southport was a safe place and they did not need to take the precautions they would take elsewhere.

### ***Location***

The initial crime analysis identified two supermarket, two charity shops and a café as key locations. However, due to the sample size the time frame was expanded to include all offences from the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 adding a further 12 offences. The investigation reports for each crime were reviewed to identify exact locations and premises the victim had visited immediately before discovering the theft. The previously identified premises now accounted for 80% (20/25) of the recorded offences.

The analysis of lost property corroborated the crime analysis and identified a charity shop at the north end and retail premises at the south end of Lord Street as additional locations.

The expanded analysis identified two 'hotspots'. The first hotspot was at the north end of Lord Street and included three charity shops and a café. The second hotspot was at the south end of Lord Street and included a supermarket and a retail premises.

#### ***North End Hotspot***

The three charity shops identified in the crime analysis accounted for all the offences recorded at charity shops. However, there are twenty-one charity shops in the town and eight are situated on Lord Street. The Police and Southport Business Enterprise undertook further research into the reasons why those premises had been targeted and discovered the following:

1. Most of the charity shops had CCTV, although none complied with the current ACPO standard. CCTV did not appear to have a deterrent effect on the offenders but did reassure shoppers and added to visitors feeling of safety.
2. The premises were staffed mainly by volunteers who saw their role as helping the charity. They did not consider themselves as a guardian to protect the premises and visitors. Additionally each shop had a large number of volunteer staff working for small periods of time that contributed to an inconsistent approach to security.
3. The charity shops located on Lord Street received the highest number of visitors from outside the town and are frequently crowded. The

coach drop off point for visitors is central Lord Street. Tourism staff responsible for meeting visiting coaches reported that visitors remained on Lord Street after leaving the coaches. This suggested the premises were targeted because of large number in the shop. In addition, Tourism staff saw themselves as a friendly welcoming face and felt that reminding visitors to look after personal property was not their role.

4. The times of the offences, between 10 am-1 pm and 2.30 pm-4 pm, coincided with the busiest times for the shops. The offences occurred when the shop was crowded and staff engaged with customers.
5. All the charity shops with the exception of the three in the hotspot had an 'open plan' layout, allowing shoppers to move freely about the shop. The three in the hotspot area used a 'narrow corridor' layout forcing all shoppers to follow the same route. The 'narrow corridor' layout created opportunities to jostle or bump into others.

The café identified in the crime analysis was similar to the many cafés that line Lord Street. The café is one of eighteen that holds a 'pavement licence' allowing tables and chairs in a cordoned area in front of the premises. A detailed analysis of the crimes showed all the thefts occurring within the cordoned area. The design, layout and clientele were not sufficiently different to other premises to be able to identify the reason for the offences. The research carried out pointed to the location as the reason. To refine the original analysis PCSO's were tasked to ask individuals matching the victim profile why they had stopped at the café. The answer was simple; having walked the length of Lord Street the café's location was the point where an elderly person was most likely to take a rest.

#### *South End Hotspot*

The hotspot at the south end of Lord Street included a major supermarket and a retail store.

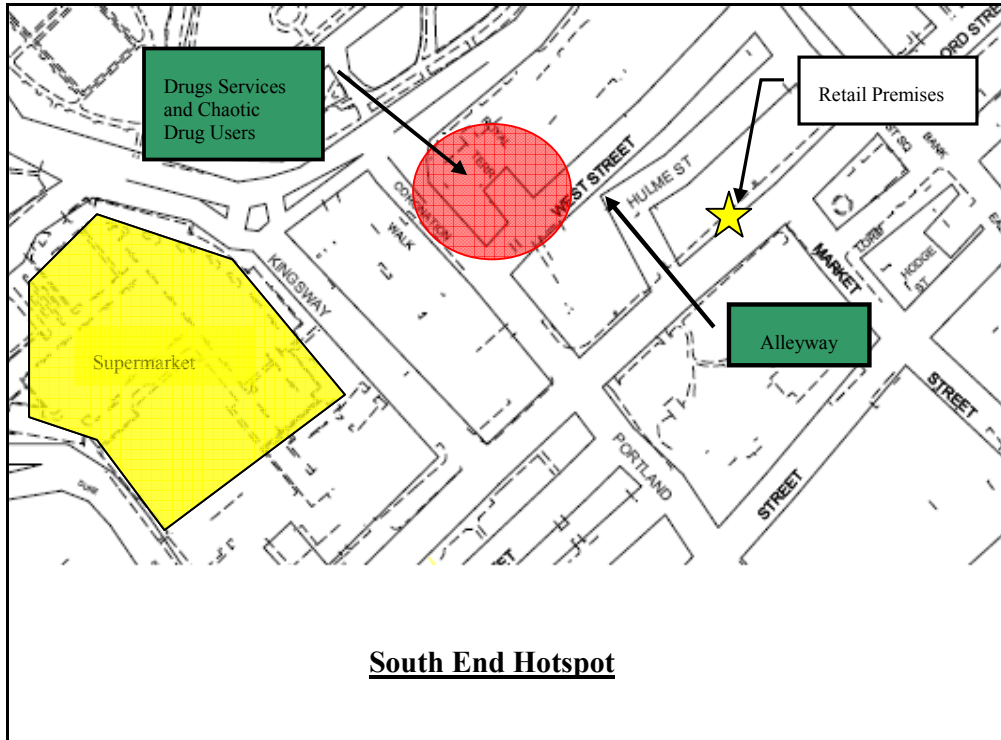
The retail store specialised in good quality clothing and targeted marketing at the elderly. The store was 'open plan' with staff walking the floor to help and assist shoppers. The supermarket is a large modern building with good CCTV that also targeted marketing at the local elderly population. In both premises the staff saw their role as a salesperson and guardian of the stores stock, not necessarily the visitors to the shop.

The shops in the immediate vicinity included jewellery shops and a catalogue shop. A nearby alley led to a terrace immediately behind the shops. A drugs service provider and a number of chaotic drug and alcohol users occupied the flats. The alley provided a quick route home that avoided CCTV coverage. An environmental audit undertaken in February 2009 recommended an alley gate



to address issues arising from the Night-time economy but installation was postponed for economic reasons.

**Table 1: Diagram of South End Hotspot**



## Offender

The Police undertook a review of the crime reports and historical arrests and convictions. A small number of offenders had been convicted in the previous three years but were either in prison or no longer in the area. The victim analysis had identified two separate methods and this strongly suggested two separate offenders or groups of offenders who were targeting victims.

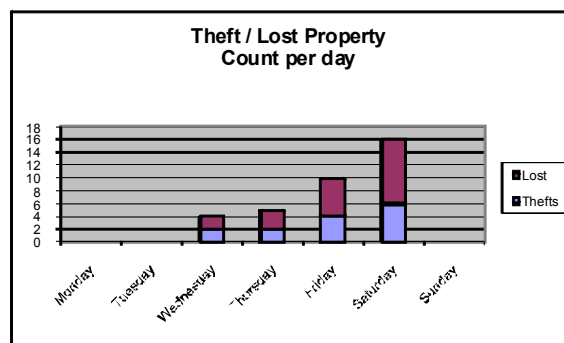
The review of crime reports located two items of CCTV footage that had recorded the offence and offender. The first offender was a male with white hair who operated at the north end hotspot. His method was to bump into or jostle the victim and steal from the open shoulder bag. The second footage showed a group of females who stole from open handbags left on shopping trolleys. None of the offenders could be identified.

The methods employed by the identified offenders did not account for all the recorded offences. Further research within the partnership focussed on the distribution of offences by day.

Tuesday has the highest level of coach visitors with up to 70 coaches visiting during the summer. Against expectation the initial analysis had not shown a single offence occurring on a Tuesday.

Southport had two Drug Service providers, one was located at the edge of the south end hotspot and the second was located 400m east of the north end hotspot. Users were prescribed a one week supply and collected their prescriptions on a Monday. The Drugs Support agencies provided anecdotal evidence that prescribed drugs were either taken in excess of the prescribed dose or traded for other drugs. The anecdotal evidence was partially corroborated by the results of mandatory drug testing. In addition to drug use many of the local users had significant alcohol issues.

**Table 2: Count of Theft and Lost Property reports by Day**



The research indicated that drug users appeared to be selling their prescription drugs in order to obtain alcohol or other drugs. After two or three days users and when this supply was exhausted offenders reverted to theft to fund their drug and alcohol use.

### *Displacement*

The victim, offender, location analysis highlighted many of the predictors and factors of displacement (Guerette, 2009). Familiarity with the area, addiction, nearby crime opportunities and the need to obtain money indicated a high risk of displacement.

## **RESPONSE**

The response was split into seven key activities identified from the analysis. The activities where:

1. Training for tourism and store staff to recognise and address crime risks.
2. Educating visitors and residents to reduce their risk of victimisation
3. Target Hardening
4. Press strategy
5. Alley gating key locations
6. Provision of drug substitutes
7. Shop Design

### *Training for tourism and store staff to recognise and address crime risks.*

All store staff in the hotspot area received a short presentation on the crime patterns and risks. This was supplemented by a daily broadcast message on the local town centre radio network and regular visits from the neighbourhood staff.

### *Educating visitors and residents to reduce their risk of victimisation*

Tourism staff who were responsible for meeting visitors received a similar presentation that included key messages, reinforcing the image of the town but reminding visitors to take the normal precautions they would take whilst out shopping.

At the beginning of the response phase each coach was met by a PCSO and a member of the Tourism Department. This proved effective but unsustainable, particularly for the Police. The Tourism Department took over the task, including the messages in their 'meet & greet'.

The Police gave presentations to the elderly in sheltered housing and residential homes. Two road shows were held in Southport to highlight the problem and provide advice to the public.

#### *Target Hardening*

The CDRP funded the capital costs to install 'Chelsea clips' at premises within the hotspot area. However, the cost was low and with the high risk of displacement it was decided to install clips at every premise's holding a pavement licence on Lord Street. In total 350 clips were installed at a cost of £136. To encourage staff to promote the use of the clips the local Health & Safety Officer recognised a potential reduction in trips hazards and advised owners accordingly.

The findings from 'Trolley Safe' (Guillaume 2009) were considered as a potential response. The cost/benefit analysis and the difficulties associated with implementing and funding a similar response across four major supermarkets in the town were deciding factors against implementing a similar response.

#### *Press strategy*

A meeting was held with the press in early June whilst the problem was being analysed. This resulted in two favourable articles providing crime reduction advice. A second meeting was held in July and a strategy agreed. The press provided positive coverage when a CCTV image of offenders was released, actively seeking and gaining national coverage for the images. This subsequently led to the identification of the lone male offender.

#### *Alley gating key locations*

Local Councillors reviewed the decision to postpone the installation of the alley gate. The Councillor's persuaded local businesses to part fund the gate and fast tracked the application through the planning process. The alley gate was installed in January 2010. The Councillors identified and funded a second location near to the north end hotspot.

#### *Provision of drug substitutes*

Drug Service providers explored the possibility of issuing prescriptions twice a week. However this entailed additional medical professionals and the cost/benefit analysis did not support the additional expense. Further discussions are taking place to address this issue.

### *Shop Design*

Crime Reduction Officers and the Retailers Association are working with the Charity shops to design out 'corridor' shops. Redesigning a shop floor and upgrading a CCTV system has a considerable cost to a charity that within the current economic environment is not a feasible option for the charities concerned. Low cost internal changes, such as moving shelving, have been made that improved movement within the shops.

Changes have been made to staff and volunteer working patterns to match resources to demand that have resulted in less crowding in shops

Future guidance from the Retailers Association will suggest that 'corridor' shop layouts should be avoided.

### *Options explored but not implemented*

Consideration was given to additional high-visibility policing and to a surveillance operation. Lord Street is a priority area for high visibility policing but the offence pattern had developed whilst high visibility policing was taking place. Consequently there was no evidence to suggest that additional patrols would have an impact.

The research for a surveillance operation was undertaken. The operation was postponed as within a short time of the response phase starting a fall in recorded offences occurred.

## **ASSESSMENT**

A post intervention analysis covering the period 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2010 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 was undertaken and compared to the same period in 2009. Both recorded crime and lost property reports were included.

The analysis included the potential displacement area along Lord Street and between the two hotspots. Chapel Street, a pedestrian street, running parallel to Lord Street with a similar mix of shops and cafés was identified as a comparison area. To ensure an accurate comparison a nearby supermarket was included in the control area (Map 1).

Map 1: Map of Southport showing Hotspots, Displacement and Control Areas



**Table 3: Recorded Crime Comparison, Pre and Post Intervention**

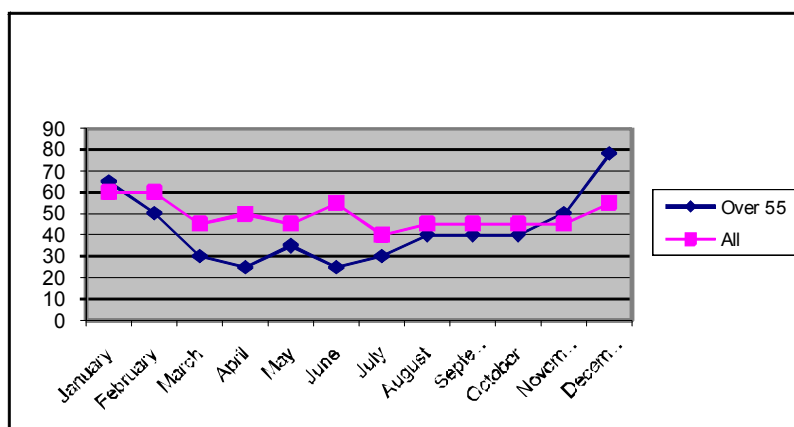
Recorded Theft for the period 1st January to 31st March			
		2009	2010
Hotspot Area		7	0
Displacement Area		4	2
Control Area		1	2

No offences have occurred in or nearby a charity shop or café during the period 1<sup>st</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> May 2010. Females remain the victims but the age profile has lowered to an average of 55 years with no victims over the age of 69.

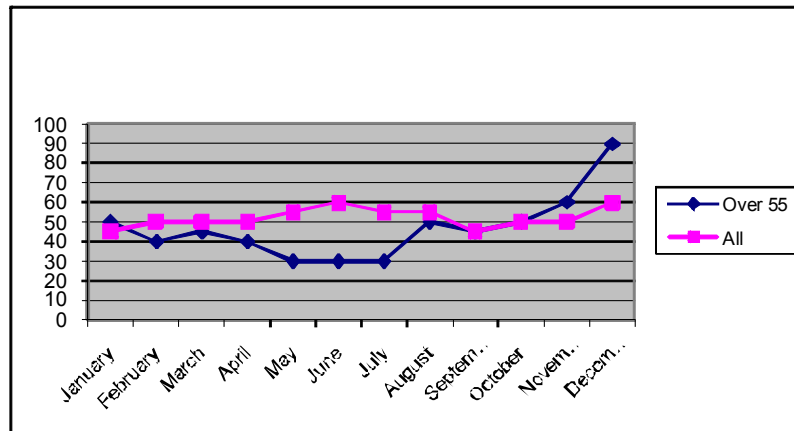
During the same period one purse was reported lost compared to the 21 reported the previous year.

An independent analysis of confidence and satisfaction levels within the local community showed an increase amongst the 'over 55's' to levels above the pre-intervention period. (Tables 4 & 5)

**Table 4: Comparison of Satisfaction levels**



**Table 5. Comparison of Confidence levels**



The increases in July closely follow local press reports and preceded many of the responses. This may be an example of anticipatory crime reduction effect of media. (Johnson and Bowers 2003)

The increases in November/December immediately follow road-shows held in October and November and may suggest that the shows successfully delivered the crime reduction advice.

Displacement and diffusion, the bonus or halo effect occasionally occurring in the immediate vicinity of the response area was assessed using the methods reported by Guerette in *Analyzing Crime Displacement and Diffusion*.



**Table 6 – Displacement & Diffusion**

<b>Measurement of Displacement and Diffusion</b>		
Gross Effect	7	Indicating a decrease in crime
Net Effect	7	Indicating a decrease compared to the control area
Weighted Distribution Quotient	0.43	Indicating a bonus effect outside the response area
Success Measure	-7	Indicating the decrease in the response was greater than the control area. Negative numbers indicate successful responses with the decrease in the response area outweighing the control area
Buffer Displacement Measure	-3	Indicating a 'halo' or bonus effect in the displacement area. Negative numbers indicate a decrease in crime in the displacement area.
<b>Total Net Effect</b>	<b>20</b>	Indicating the overall effectiveness of the response adjusted for displacement and diffusion compared to the control area. The greater the number, either positive or negative, the more effective the response, respectively.

The analysis demonstrated a reduction in the number of offences compared to the control area. A 'halo' or bonus effect occurred along the length of Lord Street, the anticipated displacement area. Overall, the interventions effectively reduced crime and had a bonus effect in the surrounding area compared to a control area.

The reasons for the bonus effect have not been thoroughly researched. There are similar premises outside the hotspot areas and there are four supermarkets within the town but offences remained localised to specific

premises. It may be that offenders living near or in the South End Hotspot where either felt insecure walking through an area extensively covered by CCTV or were too lazy to walk the additional distance.

Similarly, there does not appear to be any M.O. displacement. This offence is non-confrontational requiring manual dexterity and planning skills. At the commencement of the project there was speculation the offenders may start to commit robberies but this is a confrontational offence with a high risk of arrest and the likelihood of a significant term of imprisonment. It may be that the deterrent effect has been a factor in preventing displacement.

The dexterity and planning skills are transferable to other theft offences, such as shoplifting. No corresponding rise was seen in those offences that may suggest offenders changed their target.

Additionally, offenders would not know they had entered a hotspot. The area was purely a means for agencies to target resources and not communicated publicly. It is entirely possible that offenders saw increased activity and assumed, incorrectly, that this had been replicated across the entire shopping area.

Many of the interventions, such as the installation of alley gates, redesign of shop layouts and 'Chelsea clips' are permanent and sustainable. The Community Safety Area Partnership is developing a predictive crime analysis that includes a calendar of activities to address anticipated issues. Training for shop and tourism staff, along with road shows and visits to sheltered accommodation are the type of activity that would be included within the predictive analysis to address future issues.

The overall level of crimes reduced substantially with no displacement to surrounding areas. The age profile changed indicating elderly victims were no longer targeted. The changes to the location are permanent and, in addition to reducing the risk to the elderly, benefit the night-time economy. No displacement of offences occurred but the surrounding area felt the benefits. In conclusion, the project successfully addressed the causes of theft against elderly victims.

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