

Minutes of the North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Public Meeting

North City Business Park, Duncairn Gardens, Belfast
Wednesday, 23rd November, 2016

Political Members

Councillor Mary Ellen Campbell
Councillor Mary Clarke

Independent Members

Jennifer Cornell (Vice-Chair)
Michael Murray

Designated Organisations

Chief Inspector Stephen Burns, PSNI
Inspector Kelly Moore

Gabi Mornhinweg, H&SCT

Staff Present

Richard McLernon, Safer City Coordinator
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support Officer
Andrew Charles, Project Officer

Apologies

Councillor Nuala McAllister (Chair)
Alderman Guy Spence
Alderman Patrick Convery

1. Welcome from the North Belfast DPCSP Vice Chair

- i. The Vice Chair welcomed Members, key speakers and members of the public to the North Belfast DPCSP Public Meeting on Retail Crime. She advised that 3 presentations would be delivered, followed by the opportunity to ask questions about any other matter of concern.
- ii. Chief Inspector Burns provided a brief summary of the actions that had been undertaken by the PSNI in relation to business crime following feedback from the community. He also provided information on crime prevention initiatives that would be in place over the Christmas period, including raising awareness about keeping valuables out of site.

2. Safe Shop Scheme Presentation

- i. Sergeant Pete Cunningham provided the group with a presentation advising of the indicators that would suggest that a shopper was intending to steal from a store, the tools and techniques that they use to carry out the theft, and the powers that can be used in tackling offenders.
- ii. He also provided information on the Shop Safe Scheme, an educational training scheme delivered by the PSNI to stores and their staff to help them reduce the likelihood of thefts and to offer advice on what to do when one occurs.
- iii. Sergeant Cunningham advised that bespoke training could be provided by Crime Prevention Officers, as well as design out crime advice, and that this was particularly important for new and temporary staff over Christmas. The group were advised that being vigilant and offering good customer service was key to deterring thieves.

- iv. In response to a question as to what stage a theft is considered as such, Sergeant Cunningham advised that common sense was required, and as some premises placed tills in the centre of stores, generally when a person attempts to leave the store they are classed as thieving. He added that staff should be 100% certain that someone has stolen from store before attempting to arrest them. If there is some doubt, or it is not safe to approach the person, the police should be called.
- v. With regards to the onward sale of stolen goods, Sergeant Cunningham advised that large scale operations will go door-to-door to sell products and have houses full of goods. The use of social media and on-line buy/sell websites to advertise stolen and counterfeit goods was also discussed.
- vi. A member of the public questioned what penalties were put in place for those found to be shop-lifting.
- vii. Sergeant Cunningham advised that bail conditions can include areas of exclusion whereby the person is prevented from being in certain areas linked with their crimes. He also advised that the police were required to operate a graduated response to offending, therefore first offences could result in warnings with more serious, prolific offending resulting in Court proceedings.

3. Incendiary Devices Presentation

- i. Kathy Latcham, Crime Prevention Officer, provided the group with information on what to look for and the procedure to follow should an incendiary device be found. She added that there was currently no specific intelligence to suggest that attacks were planned over the Christmas period.
- ii. Information packs regarding crime prevention schemes were provided to all present, and DVD clips regarding incendiary devices and their impact were played as part of the presentation.
- iii. In response to the question of why such attacks were not seen anymore, Ms. Latcham advised that this could be due to increased training, awareness and improved customer service. Chief Inspector Burns added that staff should still remain vigilant and continue to meet and greet customers as they entered stores.

4. Counterfeit Notes Presentation

- i. Aidan O'Reilly, Ulster Bank, advised Members that Northern Ireland was particularly susceptible to counterfeit notes given the range of bank notes that are accepted here.
- ii. The audience were advised that Ulster Bank would be able to provide people with the serial numbers of the most regularly forged notes and that leaflets were available to advise people what to look for in counterfeit currency.
- iii. Mr O'Reilly asked retailers to do their best to remove any counterfeits from circulation, if safe to do so, and to report notes with dye stains around the outer

edges as these were likely to be from cash in transit robberies and therefore the proceeds of crime.

- iv. In terms of avoiding taking in counterfeit notes, Mr O'Reilly advised shopkeepers to use detection keyrings rather than pens. He suggested that if regular checks are seen to be being carried out, counterfeiters were less likely to target that shop in the future.
- v. He also cautioned that with the introduction of the new Bank of England polymer notes, forgers would be aiming to get rid of older paper versions. With regards to polymer notes, he advised that following their introduction in Canada, forgeries fell by 83%.
- vi. In response to a query as to why torches were better than pens at detecting forged notes, Mr O'Reilly advised that pens would make a mark on a fake note, however coatings were sometimes added to them to prevent this, and the pens themselves could also dry out rendering them useless.
- vii. A member of the public advised that he used the pens to mark noted out of tills as well as in, as in the past he had found staff to be swapping fake notes into circulation.
- viii. Mr O'Reilly advised that banks checked all lodgements using high speed counters and so any fake money would be lost to retailers. He stated that £500,000 of counterfeit notes were found in Northern Ireland per year and that it was retailers who took the hit on this. He noted that the economic downturn had not resulted in a spike of fake currency as expected, however this was likely due to several key people currently being in prison. He added that Christmas usually saw an increase in forgeries.
- ix. In response to a query as to when banks in Northern Ireland would move to polymer notes, Mr O'Reilly advised that the cost was prohibitive however once one bank made the move, others were likely to follow. He noted that changing notes also became an issue for retailers as self-serve tills had to be adapted to recognise different sized notes.
- x. In response to a query about how fake notes were distributed, Chief Inspector Burns stated that it was often sold on to buyers at cheaper prices.

5. Others areas of Concern

Recouping Costs following Thefts

- i. A member of the public questioned what was being done about fuel drive-offs. Chief Inspector Burns noted that this was a difficult issue as it was difficult to prove intent to steal rather than a mistake by the customer. He suggested that if customers were prompted at the till about paying for fuel, this intent was easier to prove. He added that automatic plate readers had been installed at some premises which was helpful in reducing the time spent by Officers in tracking down drive-offs.

- ii. A member of the public questioned the process of recouping costs associated with theft after a fixed penalty notice was issued. Chief Inspector Burns and Sergeant Connolly suggested that reimbursing should have been arranged at the time of the fixed penalty notice but agreed to take the details of the arresting Officer in this case and seek a clarification on the issue.

Contactless Payment

- iii. The group discussed the use of Apple Pay and Contactless Payment and the lack of involvement that retailers had in verifying these transactions. A retailer stated that while he wanted to facilitate these forms of payment, he was concerned about charge backs if issues were to arise, and felt that banks had not provided any advice.
- iv. Ms. Latcham advised that fraudulent use of contactless cards was more of an issue for customers than retailers due to mobile card readers used by thieves. She added that Apple Pay generally required a user's fingerprint and so was secure in this way, and contactless could only be used a certain number of times per day.

Policing Resources

- v. In response to a query regarding extra police capacity following the end of the Twaddell camp protest, Chief Inspector Burns confirmed that no additional Officers had been brought in to police Twaddell but that overtime was been used. He advised that some of the budget associated with this would remain to be directed towards Christmas operations however after this it would no longer be available.

Radio Link

- vi. A DPCSP Member voiced support for the Radio Link project which allows information between stores to be shared, and had previously been supported by the Partnership. Ms Latcham advised that information on the scheme was included within the distributed packs and that the infrastructure was still in place however 25 retailers were needed and only 11 had currently signed up. She added that the cost of £17.50 per month may be prohibitive for some, however once more retailers were involved costs could reduce.
- vii. The DPCSP Member suggested that the DPCSP could offer support to the scheme by subsidising the cost of membership.

CCTV

- viii. A retailer questioned the legality of using CCTV images on Facebook to identify shop lifters. The PSNI cautioned against this, firstly as it breached data protection legislation, and secondly because it is deemed as a break in the chain of evidence which can result in problems with future prosecutions. It was clarified that the PSNI could show witnesses a montage of images however these would be legally tested in advance and controlled by police.

6. Close

- i. The Vice Chair thanked the speakers for their informative discussion around crime prevention and thanked members of the public for their attendance. She added that a follow up event would be held in the New Year for those who were unable to attend, and that information on cyber-crime would be included.
- ii. She also provided information on the North Belfast DPCSPs 'No Hate Here' Campaign and asked retailers to get involved to show support for the message behind the Campaign, and to act as a safe place for victims of hate crime. It was suggested the businesses who signed up could be promoted through the Council or PCSP Facebook pages.
- iii. Members passed on their best wishes to Inspector Kelly Moore who would be leaving the area due to a temporary promotion.