

Case-study

Northamptonshire Business Crime Partnership

A struggling town-centre crime-reduction scheme is 're-booted' to become self-funding and extend county-wide...



The Northampton Retail Crime Initiative (NRCI) was originally set up in 2001 with council funding and the support of the police, to help drive down business-related crime and anti-social behaviour in the town.

The NRCI 'model' is now just one of six local partnerships which now cover every part of Northamptonshire, under the umbrella of the Northamptonshire Business Crime Partnership (NRCP).

The NBCP isn't the only county - or police force - wide scheme of its kind. But after 're-boot' funding from Northamptonshire's Police & Crime Commissioner, it is notable in:

- being on the verge of 100% self-funding;
- delivering demonstrable benefits to retailers throughout the county of Northamptonshire;
- delivering key elements in the PCC's Policing & Crime Plan;
- helping police fill a perceived gap in conventional neighbourhood policing;
- increasing crime reporting to police at the same time as reducing the cost of processing those reports;
- identifying first-time offenders and those with chronic and chaotic lifestyles to enable effective early intervention.

Now the NBCP is looking beyond crime-reduction toward delivering a range of innovative community-based crime-prevention programmes.

NORTHAMPTON RETAIL CRIME INITIATIVE

Since its creation in 2001, the not-for-profit NRCI has been controlled by its retailer members from Northampton town centre, operating through its voluntary Board of Directors, currently lead by Chairman Mike Brennan.

As a business crime reduction partnership (BCRP) the NRCI runs a formal 'Exclusion Scheme', banning persistent offenders such as shoplifters from the premises of all its Members. Police share data and custody images with the NRCI and provide direct access to the Northants Police intelligence system (NICHE) under an Information Sharing Agreement, and provide their daily crime summary.

Under strict criteria set by the NRCI's Board of Directors, police also serve Exclusion Orders on its behalf when offenders are taken into custody, and police bail conditions may include the obligation to abide by an NRCI Exclusion Order pending trial.

When it was first set up, the scheme benefitted from on-going financial assistance from the local council. Together with members' subscriptions this supported a team of four - a crime manager and three street rangers.

However, in 2012 the council transferred its funding role to the newly-elected Northampton Business Improvement District (BID). Two years later, following a recognition of the need to reduce its spending, the BID withdrew funding from the NRCI.

Left to rely on income from members' subscriptions only, the NRCI had to downsize radically, reducing its staff to just one – Scheme Manager Denise Ellis – and, inevitably, limiting its service-levels to members.

The reduction in the NRCI's services came at a bad time for its members. Like retailers throughout the country, they were suffering one of the biggest downturns in retail sales since the oil crisis of the early 1970s - and, at the same time, neighbourhood policing resources were under acute pressure from public spending cuts.

There was a widespread and vociferous perception of a growing policing gap in town centre policing, and a rise in low-level retail crime.

PHASE ONE: RE-BOOTING THE NRCI

Northampton town police Temporary Chief Superintendent Mark Evans had been a strong advocate of the NRCI and played an important role in rejuvenating the original scheme.

Evans believed that the solution to the perception of a 'policing gap' in Northampton's business community was to breathe new life in to the NRCI. But the days of public funding were now long-gone. Could the NRCI somehow be 're-booted' so that it could build its own revenue stream sufficient to revitalise its role in Northampton town centre?

The so-called policing gap wasn't peculiar to Northampton town centre retailers alone. So could the re-booted NRCI provide the model for supporting the retail community elsewhere in the county?

Evans turned to Sergeant Steve Lang, shortly to retire after a 30-year police career, and asked him to investigate options. While Evans joined the NRCI Board as a non-executive director, Steve Lang began to work closely with the NRCI to re-define and refine its services.

Steve faced a dilemma. Increasing revenue by raising the NRCI's membership charges risked reducing the number of members - which had already contracted to around 120. But if increasing the number of members was the only option, how could the NRCI deliver higher levels of service to more members with limited resources?

"Clearly we needed to look at radically different ways of working, to enable the NRCI to deliver a higher level of service at a lower administrative cost-per-member" says Steve Lang. "If we could do that, Denise Ellis and I both believed there was great potential for building a fully self-sustaining business model which could deliver the Board's vision."

Steve and Denise identified a number of internal functions which were time-consuming and could be streamlined by 'going online'. Among these was the preparation of the 'albums' of names and images of banned offenders and their distribution to NRCI members. The paper costs were considerable, but these paled into insignificance compared to the management costs incurred in manually delivering them and keeping them constantly updated.

"We knew of a number of online tools which offered to reduce the cost of managing image albums. We researched the options and after hearing good things about the DISC system from Littoralis, we took a closer look.

"What really impressed us with DISC is that it offered cost-savings that went far beyond the management of image albums; it provided a range of tools to address other important tasks more efficiently and at a lower cost, including membership management, compliance with Best Practice and the all-important Data Protection Act, the management of ban expiries and much else.

"It also enabled members to interact more efficiently with Denise by sending in incident reports online, and for Denise to communicate far more immediately and directly back to them - not just about offenders and banned individuals but about relevant news and urgent 'Alerts' as well as easy online access to documents and information about upcoming NRCI meetings and other events.

"What really sealed it for us was that DISC could not only deliver enhanced service levels to NRCI members in Northampton at a lower cost-per-member but the same system could do the same for other schemes irrespective of their geographical location. We felt we had identified the right online management system with which to deliver the Board of Directors' vision."

But there was more work to do before Steve and Denise could return to Mark Evan's office with a fully costed Business Plan.

"Building on the already close interworking with police was essential to the success of our plan" says Lang, "and I knew very well that they required robust systems on the part of their partners. So tight compliance with Data Protection obligations and Best Practice was critically important for the Business Plan. DISC is 'compliant by design' so that ticked all our boxes.

"We also needed to review and revise the NRCI's banning scheme itself to ensure its formal independence from the police while still benefitting from close cooperation with them."

Lang also drew up outline plans for rolling out the NRCI's services across Northamptonshire, identifying the towns and rural areas that would need their own schemes, and costing the additional management resources that each new scheme would require.

So it was that in May 2015 Lang and Ellis put the finishing touches to their Business Plan and presented it to Mark Evans, Mike Brennan and the rest of the Board. It included re-boot funding of £60,000 to cover the cost of new staffing at the NRCI, implementation of DISC, and running costs for a two-year period. The Board approved and supported the application to the office of the Northamptonshire Police & Crime Commissioner.

Many PCCs stress how important business support and partnership-working is, and the Northants PCC was no exception. He saw the benefits of the proposal - and in the summer of 2015 the application for funds was approved.

DELIVERING THE BUSINESS PLAN

Following his retirement from the police Steve Lang joined the NRCI in May 2015 as Business Development Manager. His remit was to achieve full financial self-sufficiency for the NRCI, and roll-out the NRCI 'model' right across Northamptonshire within two years.

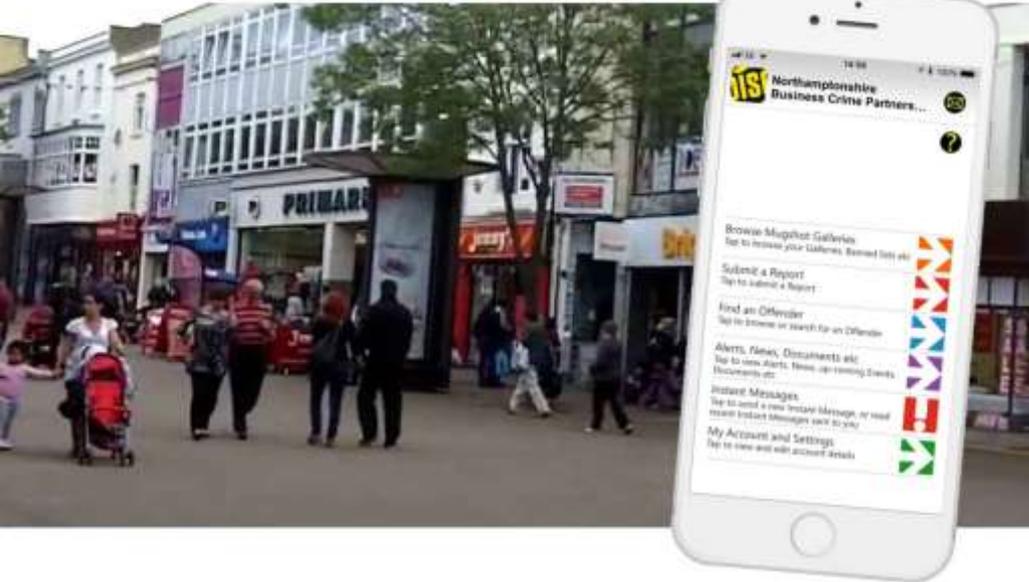
"First we needed DISC up and running. We had been impressed by how easy it appeared to be to use, but now we were to find out. I'm not a technical type, so I allocated four weeks for us to set up our database and go live with the system. In the event it took us just four days."

Next Steve and Denise began to roll out the system to NRCI members. "We started with a pilot in six stores, running DISC in parallel with the existing printed image albums. Response was very positive, so we launched the system right across Northampton in July 2015.

"It takes a lot of work to win people over to new ways of working and get their engagement, but we put in the effort, and it paid off: by the end of

the year members had logged into DISC no less than 4,500 times."

The impact of the online system was obvious - and not just in terms of internal efficiency. NRCI's own DISC-generated statistics show that its Exclusion Scheme really was working in driving down low-level crime. "In 2015 the NRCI issued 183 Exclusion Orders across



the NRCI area. By Dec 2015, only 30 of these offenders had re-offended whilst under an Exclusion Order. And just three had re-offended three times.

"In 2015, 22 per cent of our Excluded Offenders had been reported for re-offended. In 2016, across what was by then four schemes, and with higher levels of reporting through the DISC system, that figure had dropped to just 8 percent - clearly demonstrating the effectiveness of the banning scheme.

"Offenders soon realise that being banned from members' stores affects their lives, especially when the stores operate a 'Prevent, Disrupt and Deter' strategy", says Steve Lang. "This really encourages people to improve their behaviour, to avoid a further ban.

"That was pretty good evidence that the banning scheme was working for us here in Northampton. And with DISC helping members to report more frequently, we were generating more intel for the police about low-level crime and ASB in the community. That's good for early intervention of course, and better communication between the business community and police helps to build trust between them too."

With data like this at Steve and Denise's finger-tips, and the new management system fully bedded-in in Northampton, it was time to turn

their attention to the second phase of the Business Plan: extending the successful Northampton model through the rest of the county area.

PHASE TWO: NORTHAMPTON- SHIRE BUSINESS CRIME PARTNERSHIP

In October 2015, the NRCI created a new 'umbrella' organisation, the Northamptonshire Business Crime Partnership (NBCP), to manage all the Retail Crime schemes that were to be created through the county, each based on the now successful NRCI model.

The NBCP recruited recently-retired Detective Inspector Ali Farr as a new Crime Manager, and together with Steve and Denise, the team established three new Retail Crime Initiatives - in Kettering, Wellingborough and Corby – in the next 12 months.

In August 2017, they launched the Rushden Lakes and East Northants Retail Crime Initiative, centred on a major out-of-town shopping centre, but also covering the largely rural north-east half of the county. In

early 2018 the NBCP will have completed its coverage of the entire county with the launch of the South Northants Retail Crime Initiative covering Daventry, Towcester, Brackley and the rural south-west half of Northamptonshire.

In each case, the same model developed in Northampton town-centre slotted in perfectly. "The online working methods that we introduced into Northampton have been essential to this development," says Lang. "It would have been quite impossible to deliver these new schemes so quickly and the cost of delivering service to members across such a wide area would have been impossible to sustain without DISC.

"DISC certainly doesn't do our work for us - but it has enabled us to set up new schemes quickly and run them at low cost, and it frees us of the need to get bogged down in admin, so we can spend more time face-to-face with people, building relationships and expanding membership, which is so crucial to the on-going success of the organisation".

Statistics generated from the NBCP's DISC system show the level of success that it has achieved. When DISC went live in June 2015 in Northampton



The NBCP Team: Denise Ellis, Steve Lang and Ali Farr

town centre, it supported just 120 members; membership from Northampton itself grew quickly but since then, with the creation of more schemes under the NBCP umbrella, the number of retail members supported on the NBCP's DISC system has almost quadrupled and is growing still.

Following the launch of the new-look NRCI in June 2015, by the end of the year, members had logged into DISC no less than 4,500 times; in 2016 logins across all the Retail Crime Initiatives within the NBCP topped 14,000; in the first nine months of 2017 there were more than 21,000 logins and the figure for the full year is expected to exceed 28,000.

The number of incidents reported by members through DISC has grown spectacularly too. In 2016 a total of 1,704 incident reports were submitted online by members; in the first nine months of 2017 that figure has reached 2,200 with the expectation that this will top 3,000 by the end of 2017.

Says Lang: "That's a lot, but even with DISC making it easy for members to report offenders, I think only one-in-five incidents are actually reported to us - and perhaps only one-in-ten reported to police. We're still seeing only the tip of the iceberg – albeit we're seeing more and more of it.

"Last year we rolled out the DISC App to members and

COVERING COSTS

In 2015 membership of the NRCI had fallen to around 120 retailers, from a previous high of 150. With subscription rates just £80 per year for retailers with fewer than five staff, ranging up to £460 for retailers with more than 50, the average per-member subscription was around £150, representing a total revenue of approximately £18,000. This was insufficient to cover even the principle costs of NRCI's (part-time) crime manager's salary and expenses.

In May 2015 the Northamptonshire Police & Crime Commissioner provided re-boot finance for NRCI of £60,000 to fund Steve Lang's Business Plan for a two-year period. The money was spent on staffing (Steve joined as Business Development Manager), the acquisition of a DISC system (£500 implementation and £75 per month), sundry marketing materials and other expenses.

By December 2017, the NBCP has in excess of 420 members and rising, while subscription rates have been held unchanged at an average of £150 per member. With gross revenue on an annualised basis in excess of £60,000, this has been sufficient to employ a further part-time member of staff.

The NBCP currently benefits from rent-free accommodation in Northamptonshire Police's Campbell Square offices; there are no plans or pressure to relocate but the NBCP is developing sufficient revenue to do so if necessary.

Many other Business Crime Reduction Partnerships run their own local mobile radio network, and generate important revenue from it. NBCP does not offer such schemes, so its revenue is entirely based on membership subscriptions.

this has really gone down well; reporting levels grew even faster, and we can expect to see our members reporting more and more incidents as the process gets easier and easier.

"Also, we have implemented DISC's direct-to-police crime reporting system which is already sending more reports to police – and, at the same time, reducing police processing time and costs". (see *Direct-to-Police crime reporting*, below).

IMPORTANCE OF CLOSE INTER- WORKING WITH POLICE

Within two years the NRCI has enhanced its service levels, the new NBCP has extended the NRCI model right across the county, and is now operating entirely free of public funding of any kind. But, while entirely self-financing, Lang is aware that the success of the project owes a great deal, not just to initial financial support from the county's PCC, but also to practical support from Northamptonshire police.

"Close interworking with the police is essential to the kind of work we do - for example the NBCP benefits from a single Information Sharing Agreement with the police covering the sharing of appropriate local information across the different schemes we run. But interworking comes in a variety of forms and the more there is, the more successful you will be."

As a retired officer with long experience of neighbourhood policing and all the contacts that has given him, Lang has certainly made the most of his background. "I think I have known where to go and who to talk to, so perhaps we have been especially good at maximising police support for the NRCP.

"For example, when I started working for the NRCI in 2015, I was able to move Denise and myself into a police office in Northampton town centre, provided free of charge. To be on the safe side, we have built a contingency in our budget to move out into a commercial accommodation if that should ever become necessary – but there's no doubt it is enormously helpful to be in the police station.

"Also, setting up new schemes might have been relatively simple and painless - but there's always a huge job in getting retailers on board. We get support from the local senior officer, and that helps enormously. Once the scheme is up and running, on-the-ground support from PCSOs is invaluable, especially for encouraging new retailers to join the scheme and to report incidents through DISC. Police help by serving exclusion orders on the NBCP's behalf. There are so many ways that interworking between schemes and police makes life easier for both.

"And it is a two-way street. A financially independent retail crime reduction partnership is to the benefit of its members - but also very much to the benefit of police. It addresses low-level crime and anti-social behaviour in a way that police find difficult to do in the current financial climate; it provides a communications channel for them straight into the local business community; it helps get crime prevention and counter-terrorism advice out to the often hard-to-reach independent retail community. And it offers opportunities for early intervention and targeting the perennial problem of prolific but low-level offenders with chaotic lifestyles."

DIRECT-TO-POLICE CRIME REPORTING

The NBCP was one of the first BCRPs in the UK to fully deploy DISC's 'direct-to-police' crime reporting system, which is delivering cost and efficiency benefits for Northamptonshire police's '101' telephone service for non-urgent crimes.

DISC has always enabled retailers to submit Incident Reports to their DISC Administrator so that each Retail Crime Initiative's banning scheme can be maintained and kept up-to-date; where relevant, these reports can be passed on to the police. Indeed, in 2016, NBCP members submitted 1,704 incident reports online to NBCP in this way; in the first nine months of 2017 members had submitted 2,191 (full year estimate: 3,300).

However, In October 2016, the NBCP was one of the first DISC users to enable its members to 'escalate' appropriate Incident Reports (that hadn't already been reported to the police) into 'crime reports' and send them, along with optional 'MG11' Witness Statements direct to the police '101' team by email. In the 12 months since implementing the system, around 22% of Incident Reports were escalated in this way.

Says Steve Lang: "First we did a week-long trial with direct-to-police crime reporting. Then we started promoting it at our security briefings, alongside the police who emphasised that delivering crime reports like this - and more of them - would help deliver more convictions.

"Retailers didn't need much convincing: few would ring 101 to report low-level crimes because



the process took too much of their time. They were spending a long time getting through, then 20 minutes dictating the incident details, then listening to it being read back, and confirming their contact details. The whole process was taking upwards of 60 minutes. So they were very receptive to submitting them online through DISC

"Now, with direct-to-police online crime reporting, members can escalate their reports when it suits them, much of the information is automatically added to the report (for example their contact details and details of the offender(s)), and they can save their reports as 'drafts' at any time and come back to them later when convenient. In DISC, an online crime report, with Witness Statement, takes somewhere between 10 and 15 minutes".

DISC's crime reports are designed for quick copy-and-pasting into the police's back-office systems, and provide all the information they need to 'crime' the incident as well as access all available evidence, including the all-important MG11 Witness Statement.

DISC helps Northampton police to concentrate its '101' resources more efficiently by 'load balancing'. Staff can process DISC-delivered reports during low-traffic periods, thus freeing them up to service telephone callers faster and more effectively at peak periods. Indeed 101 staff who receive calls from members of NBCP are now instructed to give them the option to submit their report online through the DISC system rather than on the phone.

DISC's online crime reports (most of which are submitted with Witness Statements) neatly interface with Northamptonshire Police's 'Straight to Summons' process which aims to issue a summons straight from the receipt of a suitable crime report. This avoids the need for - and costs associate with - information collation, arrest, custody, interviews, formal charging and preparation of full case papers. Evidence shows that Straight to Summons can apply to a high proportion of prosecutions for low-level crime and ASB and can achieve 93% guilty pleas.

"The system has bedded in very well" says Steve Lang. "The accuracy of crime reports received through DISC is higher than those called-in over 101 - mainly because there are no dictation/transcription errors. Of the first 250 crime reports submitted through DISC, in only three cases did police have to attend to take a new statement face-to-face."

NRCP and police have also devised a system which solves the problem of providing CCTV footage direct to police. Few retailers have the time or patience to transfer footage from their own internal CCTV system into a separate online crime reporting system; fewer still are prepared - or can afford - to wait while very large digital files are uploaded.

Working with the police, each Retail Crime Initiative in Northamptonshire now has its own collection hub (a secure cabinet usually located in a shopping centre) where retailers deposit their CCTV footage in police-supplied tamper-proof bags. Northants police personnel then collect the bags every few days and associate each with the relevant Crime Reports submitted through DISC.

THE FUTURE

“Retail Crime Initiatives now cover the entire county - but of course there is still a very large number of retailers that are not yet members. That will always be our priority - I can't see us ever achieving 100% 'penetration' of our 'target market'. But we will be generating surplus income and, as a not-for-profit organisation, we need to ensure that we invest in supporting our members.

"I hope that as time goes by we can 'put back' into supporting new projects which are in the long-term interest of our members - but also of the wider community too. As every town or city in the country knows, most low-level retail crime is committed by a relatively small number of well-known offenders with chaotic lifestyles. The social care system is struggling – and if we can contribute, then that's where I'd like to see NBCP going, with help on jobs, rehabilitation, training and so on, to break the drink/drugs-crime-drink/drugs-crime cycle."

FURTHER INFORMATION

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