

Muti-agency problem solving to reduce anti-social behaviour car cruising

Implementation of a multi-agency problem-solving approach to reduce vehicle related anti-social behaviour (ASB) in Wolstanton retail car park.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Anti-social behaviour Public order offences Roads policing
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Region	West Midlands
Stage of implementation	The practice is no longer being implemented.
Start date	November 2022
Completion date	April 2023
Scale of initiative	Local

Aim

The aims are to:

- deter the offending behaviour of car enthusiasts
- reduce the calls for service to the police to create more capacity for officers
- prevent victimisation of local residents and further harassment, alarm and distress

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes are to:

- reduce the number of ASB car cruising incidents
- improve the quality of life for local residents
- create a reduction in demand for officers

Description

The Wolstanton retail park in Newcastle-under-Lyme was the number one ASB repeat location within Staffordshire. Between July and November 2022, vehicle related ASB incidents at this location accounted for 8.95% of total ASB calls in Newcastle- under-Lyme.

The retail park is situated in a valley-like position, due to an elevated housing estate that partially surrounds it, which can enhance the noise disturbances caused by car enthusiasts. Car enthusiasts speeding and performing stunts posed substantial risks to shoppers and other drivers. As well as contacting the control room, local residents were contacting senior police officers and local MPs directly due to the impact of the ASB on their daily lives.

Most of the incidents happened between 8pm and 1am, with the highest volumes of calls on Wednesdays and Thursdays. The location's strategic position within the road network enabled enthusiasts from all over the country to convene there. There were multiple exit points from the car park making it easier for the enthusiasts to evade police. The demand on local police resources reached critical levels and the substantial harm being inflicted on the local community was eroding confidence in the police and generating wider societal repercussions.

Local police worked with the dedicated Roads Policing Unit (RPU) using powers under Section 59 Police Reform Act 2002 to seize vehicles being used to cause alarm, harassment or distress. High

visibility patrols with RPU and Central Motorway Policing Group (CMPG) at peak times also checked offending vehicles for defects, in addition to the use of dispersal powers under Section 35 ASB Crime & Policing Act 2014 and the civil powers available in the ASB toolkit.

Storm location markers advised response officers to take a zero-tolerance approach to offences at the location. A 'Design Out Crime' report by the force's Early Intervention & Prevention Unit detailed findings and recommendations and was presented by the Newcastle-under-Lyme Commander during a meeting with local residents, Asda (part of the retail park), the council and local MP. Engagement with the local community ensured continuous updates on progress with environmental redesign work.

Response

A resolute approach was imperative, involving community engagement, education of errant drivers and the unwavering enforcement of a zero-tolerance policy. Proactive measures included:

- Section 59 warning signs, funded by the local council, were strategically placed in the car park as a deterrent – approximately 25 Section 59 notices were issued and several cars were seized due to the anti-social behaviour.
- Section 34 measures were implemented – approximately 96 warning letters were sent out to vehicles identified as causing vehicle related anti-social behaviour on Wolstanton retail park. This letter warned the registered keepers about their behaviour and notified them they were likely to be issued with a community protection warning (CPW)/ community protection notice (CPN), or Section 59 notice, and have their vehicle seized should their behaviour continue.
- Storm location markers were placed onto the location to warn other officers it was subject to a problem profile. The marker advised officers, especially response officers who were not always aware that it was a repeat ASB location, to take a zero-tolerance approach to any offences taking place at the location.
- High visibility officers would patrol during identified peak times and unmarked, non-uniform patrols would regularly patrol to identify and record offences taking place.

The proactive measures had some impact on the ASB at the location, but the problem continued and a longer-term permanent solution was required. A dedicated police officer, serving as a problem solver, took ownership of the problem and coordinated further activities:

- The force's Early Intervention & Prevention Unit (EIPU) were requested to conduct an environmental visual audit at the location and produced a 'Design Out Crime' report documenting their findings and recommendations.
- Officers engaged with the community and completed community contact records.
- Supervisors met with members of the community to listen to the impact it was having on their lives.
- The landowner was identified and involved in the problem-solving process. This was initially problematic due to the car park having different owners for different sections.

Following this activity, a key meeting was arranged with local residents, Asda's area manager, Newcastle's command team including Chief Inspector Owen, the local council, and the MP, during which Asda were provided with the 'Design Out Crime' report. The Commander highlighted the extensive efforts being made by Staffordshire Police to curb the anti-social behaviour, but that it was the car park's design and accessibility that enabled car enthusiasts to gather and caused the residents to be so negatively affected.

The force informed Asda that failure to protect residents from this vehicle-related activity could result in a Community Protection Warning being issued against them. Responding swiftly, Asda agreed to implement recommendations from the 'Design Out Crime' report. The report recommended actions that Asda could take to deter ASB and crime on their premises. As a result, Asda took the following steps:

1. Agreed to install barriers which would be closed after 9:30pm, effectively limiting vehicle access to a significant portion of the car park. Installation was completed at the end of January 2023.
2. Agreed to dim the lighting in the affected area to make it less appealing for gatherings and socialising.

Consistent communication channels were maintained with the residents and continuous updates were provided whilst the work was ongoing. These changes have been instrumental in deterring the vehicle-related anti-social behaviour, improving community safety and confidence for residents.

Overall impact

Between the months of July to November 2022, ASDA vehicle related ASB accounted for 8.95% cent of Newcastle's total ASB calls. Between July to November 2023, ASDA vehicle related ASB

accounted for 0.16% of Newcastle's total ASB calls.

There is a concern that resolving the problem at ASDA could cause displacement to other areas and work is ongoing to target car cruisers. Newcastle-under-Lyme has successfully won a bid for a council-deployable CCTV camera, which can be used in hotspot areas should the problem migrate to another location.

The local residents have reported that the work completed have stopped ASB car enthusiasts in the retail car park. Regular contact was maintained with the local community throughout to ensure the problem had been resolved and residents felt safe and reassured. This contact is still maintained even though the problem has been resolved and the profile closed.

Learning

It is crucial to highlight the importance of recognising the unique characteristics of each location. This means understanding that what effectively addresses car cruising on one retail park may not necessarily work in other hotspot areas due to varying factors such as road layout, trading hours, or car park design.

Comprehensive assessments need to be conducted by Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) or Designing Out Crime Officers (DOCO) at each location. These assessments should be tailored to the specific environment, enabling the formulation of suitable recommendations to tackle the issue effectively.

To to have a successful outcome, it is essential to have a collaborative effort involving multiple stakeholders. For instance, securing cooperation from retail establishments like Asda required the involvement of various parties, including senior police officers, local police officers, police community support officers (PCSOs), local council representatives, Members of Parliament (MPs), CPOs, and concerned residents. This collective approach demonstrated a united front in addressing the problem and negotiating practical solutions.

Specifically, the engagement with Asda resulted in the installation of barriers to deter car cruisers from entering the premises after designated hours. This intervention not only addressed immediate concerns but also showcased the effectiveness of public-private partnerships in tackling community issues. Asda agreed to pay and install barriers onto their land to prevent car cruisers gathering on an evening. However, prior to the installation of the barrier, they would set out cones to act as a

temporary measure to prevent further disturbance.

The council's commitment to support enforcement efforts by issuing Section 59 warning notices underscores the importance of a multi-faceted approach to combatting ongoing problems. By leveraging legal measures and local authority support, law enforcement agencies can reinforce efforts to deter antisocial behaviour and promote community safety.

Staffordshire Police are currently working with Newcastle Borough Council to implement a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) to cover car cruising across the whole of Newcastle-Under-Lyme. This is something Stockport have had great success with.