

Operation guardian taskforce – reducing knife crime robbery

A taskforce consisting of dedicated teams specifically recruited to reduce serious youth violence and knife enabled robberies in public spaces.

First published

2 May 2025

Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Knife and gun crime Violence (other) Robbery
Organisation	West Midlands Police
Contact	John Askew
Email address	john.askew@westmidlands.police.uk
Region	West Midlands
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2022
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Offenders
---------------------	-----------

Aim

Operation guardian taskforce aims to:

- provide a dedicated resource to contain current serious youth crime and knife enabled robbery hotspots
- support local policing teams and partner agencies with existing problem-solving plans
- offer offender management tactics
- conduct bail check of robbery nominals

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of operation guardian taskforce are:

- reduce the number of serious violence incidents
- reduce the number of knife crime offences
- reduce the number of knife enabled robberies
- improve public trust and confidence in the force's ability to manage serious youth violence
- improve engagement with young people to gather intelligence and identify vulnerabilities
- enhance opportunities to provide intervention pathways and rehabilitative referrals

Description

West Midlands Police (WMP) has recorded the highest number of knife offences nationally in recent years. The West Midlands has a disproportionately high population of young people, with Birmingham having the highest number of under 25s in the United Kingdom.

Operation guardian taskforce

The guardian taskforce (GTF) consists of one inspector, five sergeants and 36 constables, divided into four teams covering the force's area. The teams cover the following areas:

- Eastern team covering Solihull and Coventry
- Two central teams covering all of Birmingham
- Western team Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Dudley

The task force is funded by the Home Office's Hotspot Action Fund with the purpose of reducing serious violence, knife crime and knife enabled robberies. The funding was initially granted for 2023-2025. A further grant agreement of £3.7 million to WMP is currently in the final stages for 2025/26.

The total spending on the GTF staffing amounts to £2.8 million and is part funded by WMP.

The GTF are deployed daily to robbery hotspots that are analytically identified from two years of police data. The hotspots are identified by intel analysts who are funded by the GTF grant agreement. This means resources are targeted and precise in their deployments. Tasking requests from local policing teams and local analysis support the task force in identifying new emerging hotspots.

The team are regularly briefed on current robbery, knife crime and public place violence analytics. Officers are deployed on a shift pattern of three 10:00 to 18:00, three 14:00 to 23:00, three rest days.

The GTF utilises the following tactics:

- plain-clothes behavioural detection and uniformed policing to maximise opportunities to recover knives as well as make arrests.
- conduct knife arch operations (walk-through metal detectors for knives and other weapons).
- [project servator](#) deployments (a national campaign designed to deter and detect criminal activity, including terrorism, while reassuring the public).
- knife sweep and engagement activities such as school-based inputs.
- working with local policing teams to share expertise and confidence on how to conduct stop and searches.

The teams are available via tasking requests to arrest outstanding offenders, complete offender management visits and bail checks of robbery nominals.

Overall impact

For 2024/25 operation guardian taskforce has:

- been deployed 923 times
- provided over 35,000 visible patrols in robbery hotspots
- conducted 3,659 stop and searches
- submitted 1,990 intelligence reports
- arrest 666 offenders, 97 of these arrests were for knife enabled robbery
- completed 514 rehabilitation referrals

In comparison to the previous year (2023/24) there was a:

- 18% reduction in knives used in serious violence incidents
- 36% reduction in knife enabled robbery offences committed by under 25s

Learning

- It is essential to have a dedicated resource, protecting officers from wider policing demands. By allowing staff to concentrate on specific priorities consistently and limiting distraction, it amounted to greater performance outcomes.
- Arrangements have been in place to ensure that taskforce teams handover their arrests to investigation or local teams. Taskforce staff do not keep investigations, these get allocated to local investigation teams or other local policing teams when a crime report is taken out. This protects the taskforce officers' time from the demands of investigations and allows them to focus on visible patrol supporting local policing teams. It is important to gain a central and local understanding to prevent challenges between taskforce and local teams.
- It is paramount to ensure that local policing areas see the value and outcomes working with the taskforce teams. A daily duty note from all teams summarising their deployment activities and outcomes is shared. Successes and outcomes are also highlighted for local morning threat and risk management meetings. An end of month performance document is circulated and briefed to violence leads through governance boards to highlight performance and show accountability.
- Local teams have learned from operational tactics used by the taskforce teams. They have gained a greater degree of success when deploying proactively in hotspot locations.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.