

Safer Town Centres Initiative

Review and Outcomes

November 2025



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FOR HERTFORDSHIRE



Purpose of the initiative



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The Safer Town Centre Initiative sought to:

- to make towns and parks across Hertfordshire safer through implementing measures to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour
- to restore community confidence by doing this
- bring together police, local councils, trading standards, charities and other groups to deliver a partnership approach to crime prevention and community safety

Build on the success of Operation Hotspot – this reduced crime, ASB and violence in town centres by 14.5% over 12-month period.

Encouraged continued focus on town centres not covered by Op Hotspot to ensure they are not overlooked and have access to funding.

Strategic allocation of PCC resources to bridge funding gaps.

Police and Crime Plan

Fighting Crime, Making Hertfordshire Safer



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Town centre crime is a strategic priority in the Police and Crime Plan, which seeks to ensure town centres are safe places where people want to spend time and business want to invest.

Safer Town Centres Initiative:

- Delivers on the commitment to visible and accessible policing through increased patrols and engagement.
- Focuses on protecting vulnerable people, including women, girls and young people in public spaces.
- Strengthens partnership working with councils, businesses, and community groups.
- Builds public confidence by tackling crime hotspots
- Demonstrates the PCC's commitment to safer, more welcoming town centres for all.

Timeframe and scope



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Initiative ran from 30th June to 30th September 2025.

Scope – PCC funding primarily for non-Operation Hotspot location, or for projects in Operation Hotspot locations that are not eligible for Home Office funding.

Eligible bids may include:

- physical improvements to safety or security in town centres
- projects designed to reduce retail crime or ASB
- projects to improve safety in the night-time economy
- youth diversionary work
- town centre problem solving

CCTV and patrols were not eligible for funding.

Geographic Locations



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Operation Hotspot priority areas:

Bishop's Stortford
Borehamwood
Hemel Hempstead
Hertford
St Albans
Stevenage
Waltham Cross
Watford
Welwyn Garden City

Non-Hotspot town centres

Berkhamstead
Harpenden
Hitchin
Hoddesdon
Letchworth
Rickmansworth
Ware

Other areas

Cassiobury Park (Watford)
Hartham Common (Hertford)
Hatfield Galleria

Impact and Outcomes

A review of our data for the summer period tells us that the initiative contributed to making our town centres a safer place for residents of Hertfordshire to live, work and spend time.



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**Note: Data is June-Aug 2025
compared to June-Aug 2024**

We saw a **6% reduction in overall crime** in our town centres over the summer initiative period.

Across all town centres, we saw a **6% reduction in theft shoplifting** – meaning 144 fewer offences in our shops and businesses.

There was a **28% reduction in criminal damage**, resulting in 36 fewer victims over the summer period. We **halved** the number of public order offences, meaning 50% fewer people suffered abuse or hate.

There were **13% fewer business burglary reports** - shops were safer and retail staff less at risk. We received **66% fewer reports of cycle theft**, an issue often of concern for local residents.

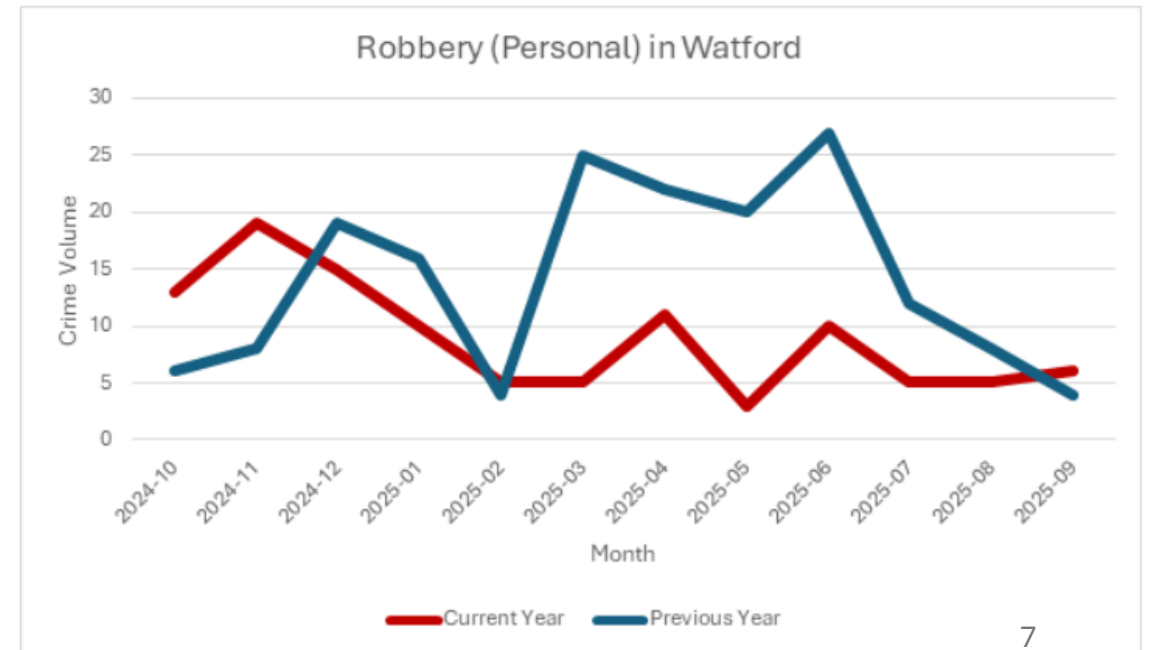
We also had a **5% increase in possession of drugs offences**. There are most frequently crimes that are proactively detected by police so this indicates an increase in police visibility and proactive police stops in our town centres.

Case Study 1 – Watford and Cassiobury Park robbery



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- Robbery is a high-harm crime type in Watford – it was identified as the largest hotspot for Herts in 2024/25.
 - Watford April-Sept 2024 – 93 personal robberies
 - Cassiobury Park April-Sept 2024 – 10 personal robberies
- Prior to 2025, Cassiobury Park had not been included as an area of focus
 - Neighbourhood team identified concerns – our data enriched by local knowledge
- Meaningful interventions deployed as part of the initiative included:
 - knife arches installed
 - funding for mounted patrols
- Positive outcomes
 - Watford April-Sept 2025
37 personal robberies (**60% decrease**)
 - Cassiobury Park April-Sept 2025
2 personal robberies (**80% decrease**)



Case Study 2 – St Albans retail theft



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- Retail theft in St Albans had sharply increased over winter 2024 into 2025
- Town centre initiative in the city focused on targeting this crime type
- Meaningful interventions included:
 - Focus on targeting prolific shoplifters
 - Joined up partnership work with retailers / businesses
 - Arrest of 2 offenders during a robbery of a phone shop
- Positive outcomes
 - Reversal of 2024 trend of increasing retail theft.
 - **20% decrease** in retail theft offences in summer 2025 compared to summer 2024 – this is **168 fewer offences**



Broxbourne

- Secured a CBO against a prolific offender with banning conditions for several different shops
- 2 x arrests of prolific shoplifters
- Patrols of crime hotspots
- 17% reduction in theft offences



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PCC Activity:

- Walkabout with the Chief Constable and visit to local charity shop with local MP
- Visit to Waltham Cross Boxing Academy



Dacorum



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- Arrests of prolific shoplifter
 - Welfare check at restaurant – HMO enforcement to be undertaken
 - Licensing objection submitted for premises linked to ASB
 - Engagement events held including beat surgeries and supporting production of a music video with a charity that raises awareness of hate crime.
 - Crime prevention workshops held for retailers at The Marlowes.
-
- 56% reduction in criminal damage offences
 - 28% reduction in theft offences

PCC Activity:

- Walkabout with NPT officer



East Herts

- Trading standards-led operations, seizing nearly 600 illegal vapes and recovering £80k cash from one premises.
- Targeted graffiti clean-up to improve town centre experience
- Patrols of Old Town Live Festival to deter offenders
- Proactive operation with BTP at Bishops Stortford train station to target shoplifters using the rail network.
- Prolific town centre cycle theft offender arrested – charged with 12 cycle theft offences.
- Herts Fire & Rescue water-safety event
- Pubwatch event and crime prevention stalls
- Funding bid: Operation Vigilant, a proactive deployment in Bishops Stortford during VAWG Week of Action. This included digital team to tie in with Safer Town Initiative comms.
- 10% reduction in theft offences
- 6% reduction in offences of violence

PCC Activity:

- Accompanied closure of shop selling illegal vapes
- Attended vape shop inspection and local walkaround
- Walkaround of local area with Minister
- Met with local BID



Hertsmere



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- 15 x arrests for different offences, including prolific shoplifters
- 2 x CBO applications for repeat offenders
- Series of community engagement events, including “Coffee with a Cop” and business intelligence surveys.
- Licensing checks at pubs and retail premises
- “Crucial Crew” scheme, organised by council and delivered with partners to over 800 school pupils to teach them about personal safety, staying safe online and knife crime.
- Targeted foot patrols in town centres to secure Business Watch sign-ups.

PCC Activity:

- RPU patrol focusing on e-scooters



North Herts



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- 4 x arrests of prolific shoplifters
- Trading standards-led operation on vape shop resulted in seizure of 6000 counterfeit cigarettes & 1000 vapes – total value approx. £80,000. Premises closure order subsequently granted.
- Safety talks at local academies
- Op Urban patrols to locate and support rough sleepers into accommodation.
- Funding bid: Accreditation scheme in NTE to promote and prioritise safety of women and girls in licensed premises, including inviting premises to sign up to “minimum standards” charter. Supported by a promotional video.
- Funding bid: Proactive patrols alongside implementation of Women's Safety Charter to complement work with licensed premises that are part of the scheme. Included proactive premises visits.
- Significant decrease in public order offences in Hitchin town centre compared to summer 2024 – 16 fewer offences.
- 49% decrease in theft offences
- 12% decrease in offences of violence

PCC Activity:

- Attended Women's Safety Charter Inaugural Awards



St Albans

- 10 x arrests for offences, including of prolific shoplifters.
- Overt patrols in Verulamium Park to address youth ASB, resulting in reassurance and no further ASB reports.
- Multi-agency engagement at city-centre market stall including housing, fire, BID and NHW. Herts Connected sign-ups and crime prevention advice delivered.
- ASB partnership meeting with McDonald's management to plan for youth ASB reduction.
- Press release and comms activity planned for 'One Punch MO' campaign following 4 GBHs in the city centre.
- Business Day of Action planned and delivered in partnership with Op Hotspot team and local businesses.
- 23% decrease in theft offences

PCC Activity:

- Launched the Safer Town Centre campaign in St. Albans



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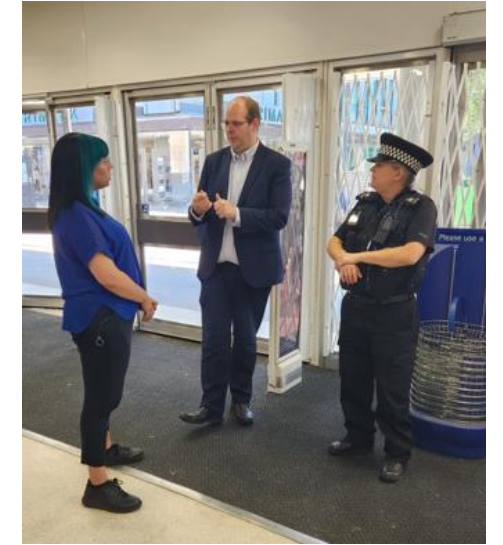


Stevenage



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- Series of proactive operations to tackle community priorities – 17 x arrests, 5 x searches, 13 e-bikes/e-scooters seized
 - Shop watch and licensing visits to premises of note
 - Bike marking operations run
 - Knife sweep operations with police cadets
 - Test purchase operations for knife sales.
 - Partnership work to develop Safer Routes scheme
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- 30% decrease in criminal damage offences
 - 20% decrease in public order offences



PCC Activity:

- Walkabout through the town centre on hotspot patrol
- Visit to local shop to talk about retail crime
- Bedwell visit to talk about Clear, Hold, Build work done there
- Walkabout through old town to look at nighttime economy signage bid to help keep women safe in the evenings



Three Rivers

- Visit to licensed premises identified 40+ youths drinking on the premises. Warning notice issued.
- Clean-up of NOS cannisters in town-centre playing fields to discourage further use as a hotspot.
- Executed 2 drugs warrants linked to town centre offending.
- CPW served on prolific town centre offender.
- Proactive joint police-retailer operation targeting shop with a high crime rate.
- Pop-up partnership stalls in retailers.

PCC Activity:

- Attended an operation targeting shoplifters in Carpenders Park



Watford



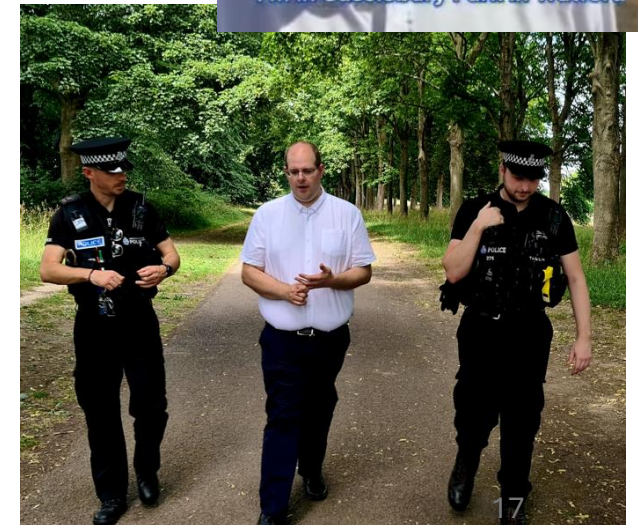
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- Enhanced patrols of areas of high crime, including transport hubs and ASB hotspots.
- Funding bid: Deployment of mounted police in Cassiobury Park during periods of high footfall, including Herts Pride.
- Funding bid: Delivery of conflict management training to nearly 50 shops and businesses. Supported by the town centre BID and aimed at managers and supervisors to allow them to cascade learning and provide consistency.
- 63% decrease in robbery offences
- 10% decrease in vehicle crime
- 23% decrease in criminal damage

PCC Activity:

- Arson visit in Watford town centre
- Cassiobury Park visit on a Hotspot control
- Cassiobury Park visit for both mounted police events

Hertfordshire put the 'neigh' in neighbourhood policing today 🐾... See more



Welwyn Hatfield

- Dedicated Hatfield Galleria PC and PCSO undertook enhanced patrols, including personal visits to every shop in the centre.
- Joint police and trading standards visits of vape shops, resulting in seizure of non-compliant items
- Arrests of 6 x prolific shoplifters
- VAWG Walk-and-Talk
- Recovered £8000 worth of stolen goods following two separate arrests of shoplifters.
- 19% reduction in theft shoplifting in Galleria over summer period, against spring.
- 12% decrease in offences of violence

PCC Activity:

- Visited shop to talk about retail crime
- Joined an RPU patrol targeting e-scooters



County-wide activity



- Taxi marshal scheme in Watford & Hertford – taxi marshals deployed at town centre ranks to reduce violence, non-payment of fares and unfair charging.
- Hertfordshire Fire & Rescue – undertook arson patrols in hotspots to reduce deliberate fire-setting. Also delivered series of engagement events.
- Trading standards undertook county-wide activity. This included intelligence visits for age-restricted goods, such as tobacco and vapes, as well as providing advice to businesses and dissemination of comms on social media

Funding bid: Operation Ironworks which will deliver 10 knife amnesty bins in public spaces across Hertfordshire, with QR codes directing users to charities and safe reporting methods. Also to supply 60 Bleed Control Kits across the county including in taxis and on buses.

Mobile police station: A community vehicle that can be deployed to key areas and crime hotspots in town centres by police.

Financial Review

Overview



Funding was essential to unlock meaningful engagement and partnership working with Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) , and on this occasion, the PCC stepped in to establish a local grant scheme. While this enabled progress, it is not a sustainable solution and highlights the need for more consistent national investment.

Grant scheme allowed police, local authorities, third sector and business groups to develop and fund proposals that focused on delivering initiative aims.

- bids up to £15,000 – for Constabulary, district / borough / town / parish councils, Community Safety Partnerships
- bids up to £6,000 – for community, voluntary or charitable groups, or business sector organisations.

To fund interventions at neighbourhood level and undertake proactive place-based crime reduction.

Match funding made available to allow for larger or more complex projects to be funded.

All listed town centres were eligible for funded activity, including Operation Hotspot areas.

Financial Review

Breakdown of Bids



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Bid Originator	Number of Bids
Statutory Safety Partnerships	9
Third Sector	6
Business Sector	2
Total	17

Bid Type	Number of Bids
ASB/Community Safety	9
VAWG	4
Business / Retail Crime	3
Serious Violence	1

Award Made by Theme	Total
Serious Violence	£15k
VAWG	£15k
Business/Retail Crime	£13k
ASB/Community Safety	£15k
Total	£58k

Public Confidence

A survey was conducted at the end of June as we were launching the project. It was publicised on social media and through Herts Connected and had 1271 response. These were used to inform local patrols plans and grant bids.

We used PCC social media platforms to tell stories from the initiative and raise aware of the work being done in town centres. This encouraged engagement and dialogue with the community. Our comms approach was aligned with the Constabulary to build a brand and increase public awareness.

Our content resonated with residents and helped build public confidence with those we don't traditionally reach – demonstrated by an 18% reach from a non-follower audience.

Over the initiative the Constabulary and OPCC's communications gained 12.3 million engagements, building awareness and increasing followers.

A second survey is being launched in October, allowing analysis of the impact of the initiative on residents. It will also look forward to the Autumn and Christmas periods to inform our approach to these



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Thanks for the update! Cassiobury Park is such a well-loved space, especially in this weather, so it's great to hear it's receiving extra attention. I've definitely noticed a reassuring presence from the patrols — it makes a real difference.

To continue improving safety, it might be worth considering:

- More visible signage reminding people about alcohol restrictions and littering fines.
- Occasional joint patrols with community officers or PCSOs, especially during peak times.
- Extra bins or regular litter picks after busy weekends to keep the park clean and safe for families.

Appreciate all the efforts being made to keep the park welcoming and secure for everyone!



Great idea to engage with the public..great initiative..PLEASE keep ut up @@!



Pls keep it up! Thank you



Brilliant. Well done. 👍



This is good im really enjoying herts police stepping up on this and anti social behaviour recently. Just a general rise in police presence is good.

Town Centre Perceptions: Local Impacts



Early findings from the latest public survey*, launched in early November, show positive change and improvement over the three-month period from June around safety and visibility. The Safer Town Centres initiative provides a strong foundation for further action to build trust and enhance safety.

- Growing Sense of Safety:** Since the first survey launched at the beginning of July, **12% of people indicated that they now feel safer**, with nearly 10% reporting they feel 'a little safer.' In part contributed by summer patrols and community engagement which are starting to resonate with the public.

- Improved Police Visibility:** Almost **1 in 5 respondents (19.7%) noticed more police presence** compared to June, with the majority describing this as 'a little more visible.' This is a clear step forward in addressing one of the top concerns raised earlier in the year.

- Community Awareness of Patrols:** Nearly **20% of respondents were aware of summer patrols**, and those who noticed increased visibility often cited seeing officers on foot or PCSOs on patrol. This demonstrates that visible policing is making a tangible difference for some residents.

- Stable Visiting Patterns for Most People:** Despite challenges, **73% of respondents continue visiting town centres as often as before**, showing resilience and confidence in local areas.

Impact: What Went Well



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- Positive outcomes across different crime types and areas.
- Scheme broadly well-received by partners who saw the value of what was offered.
- Diverse range of bids submitted from a variety of bidders, to include enforcement and engagement.
- Provided opportunities for sharing learning and ideas between CSPs, ensuring best practice and innovation were accessible to all.
- Reduction in key crime types over summer period when compared to summer 2024.

Impact: Lessons Learned



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- Partners value a longer lead-time to prepare for bids – it is likely that we will receive a wider variety of bids across all districts.
 - To note – it is not always possible to give more notice due to funding availability
- CSPs would benefit from data to help inform their bids.
- Strategic collaboration brings value. This should be encouraged in future work to tackle town centre crime.
- Reporting requests from Home Office are unachievable.

Recommendations and Next Steps



Re-position expectations around thematic areas & encourage consistency across CSPs

- acknowledge that each CSP has different priorities and may approach the initiative differently, but their work should be coalesced around themes

Thematic areas for 2025 (including supporting the 'Winter of Action' plans):

- Hallowe'en and Bonfire Night – ASB
- run up to Christmas – theft shoplifting, assaults on retail staff, NTE

CSPs/partners will be encouraged to bid for initiatives to go live over these two key periods

- setting expectation that bids will be data-driven
- OPCC will support CSPs with access to data to ensure bids focus on priority areas and issues
- e.g. if there is a repeat trend in crime in a town centre annually, plan proactive work to tackle this