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Business crime reduction partnerships: examining a holistic approach

Andrew B Stafford

Jonathan Hobson

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Abstract

- Purpose

There has been a widespread move in England's city centres to a Business Crime Reduction Partnership (BCRP) model that welcomes businesses from all commercial sectors and that operate during day time and night time trading hours, and that seeks to tackle a broad range of crimes and associated behaviours. This article considers whether this new holistic approach offers benefits that narrower models do not.

- Design/methodology/approach

This study draws upon data from a multi-year examination of the Gloucester City Safe BCRP, including quantitative analysis of 4523 offences recorded by the partnership and qualitative analysis of 149 interviews with its members.

- Findings

In Gloucester there was a small minority of offenders who commit offences against more than one type of business, who offend during both the day time and night time trading hours and who commit more than one type of offence. There is value, therefore, in partnerships bringing together businesses from different commercial sectors and that operate in the day and night time economies to coordinate their efforts to tackle such activity.

- Practical implications

Sharing information among partnership members via email and secure web-based platforms helps raise awareness concerning offenders and the offences that they commit which in turn can be used to prevent offences from occurring.

- Social implications

This inclusive holistic BCRP model can lead to an increased sense of community cohesion for its members arising from the collective effort of multiple types of businesses.

- Originality/value

The authors are not aware of other studies that have considered these issues.

Key words

Business crime reduction partnership, city centre, night time economy, shoplifting, Gloucester City Safe, community safety.

Introduction

Commercial businesses face a unique range and combination of crime related threats (Burrows and Hopkins, 2005; Levi and Hyde, 2013; Williams, 2017). Initiatives designed to increase safety and reduce

vulnerability for businesses have taken many guises, some bringing together particular types of businesses through ‘shop-watch’ or ‘pub-watch’ schemes, some focusing on tackling particular crimes or behaviours, and others concentrating efforts in particular geographical locations such as town centres or shopping precincts. In whichever form they take, Business Crime Reduction Partnerships (BCRPs) that bring together members of the commercial sector and other stakeholders have become commonplace in England and Wales and are promoted by criminal justice operators as offering benefits such as reductions in crime, empowerment and peace of mind for workers (Metropolitan Police, 2018), as well as more comprehensive intelligence concerning crimes against businesses (College of Policing, 2018).

Recent years have seen a widespread move to a new model of business crime reduction partnership. Under this model, businesses from different commercial sectors and those that operate during day time, evening or night time trading hours are all part of one initiative, rather than only involving themselves in the initiative that most relevant to their operating hours or business activity. Moreover, although the traditional technologies used by crime reduction initiatives such as radio and CCTV networks are still utilised by BCRPs, they have now been enhanced by the addition of virtual information sharing platforms and intelligence repositories. Partnerships such as London’s ‘Safer Business Network’ not only welcome businesses of all types and sizes but use web-based technology to share information on crime, crime prevention, prolific offenders and other incidents of note (Safer Business Network, 2018). Lastly, membership of such partnerships often involves adhering to and enforcing a shared set of principles or a particular approach to crime reduction. For example, the Brighton and Hove BCRP, in addition to offering its members a radio network and secure web platform for information sharing, employs an exclusion scheme whereby those judged to have committed behaviours of a certain severity are banned from all member premises (Brighton & Hove BCRP, 2018).

A similar model operates in the city of Gloucester and across some of the surrounding areas of Gloucestershire, England. This BCRP, ‘Gloucester City Safe’, launched in May 2014, is a not-for-profit crime reduction partnership designed to tackle local occurrences of issues such as shoplifting, theft, anti-social behaviour, alcohol related disorder, street drinking and begging (Gloucester City Safe, 2018). Its members, who have voluntarily opted to join the scheme, include businesses, restaurants, bars, retail establishments, public facilities and transport services operating in the day time and night time economies. Members display a sticker with the partnership’s logo in a prominent, externally visible position at their premise, and commit to using and enforcing a two-tiered exclusion-based sanction system. Members can issue sanctions to persons in or near their premises who they deem to have committed an offence in line with the classifications of crime and associated behaviour employed by the partnership (see Table 1). These include crimes such as criminal damage, drunk and disorderly behaviour, shoplifting and assault as well as associated behaviours such as begging, attempted theft, misuse of ID and verbal abuse. The first tier, a ‘yellow card’, is a warning for the offender, and the second, a ‘red card’, is an exclusion that applies to all member premises. The sanctions are recorded by the BCRP’s manager and logged in a database on a secure web platform which all members can access and that is shared with the police. The information in the database is used primarily to increase the awareness of members (and of all employees of a member business) concerning the crime, disorder and individuals that might pose a risk to their business, and to facilitate aligned partnership-wide efforts to mitigate these risks. The partnership’s manager will share information with members via a radio network and through regular email updates, the latter of which will often contain images and details of recent offences and offenders and will invite members to help identify unknown offenders caught on camera.

Despite the widespread existence of BCRPs that employ the same approach as Gloucester City Safe and the huge investment that businesses make each year in to security and crime reduction efforts, what works and what best practice looks like for BCRPs remains unclear. As Hopkins and Gill (2017: 389) note, ‘Criminologists have not only paid little attention to the extent and patterns of crime against businesses,

but relatively little evidence exists about what works in reducing crime against the commercial sector'. The effects of shop-watch schemes on levels of theft are uncertain (Tilley, 2010) and the usefulness of such crime reduction partnerships have been questioned by businesses (Mawby, 2014). Although various governing and umbrella business crime reduction organisations promote the value of broadly focused, holistic BCRPs and of technology-enhanced information sharing platforms (NBCS, 2016; 2018), the approaches employed and the mechanisms involved require scrutiny if understanding of effective practice in this field is to be advanced.

The authors aim to contribute to the evidence in this area. This article presents an examination of certain key aspects of Gloucester City Safe's approach to reducing crime against its members and highlights a range of issues of relevance for those interested in the study or application of such initiatives. The first part of the article considers the value of bringing together businesses that operate in different commercial sectors and in the day and night time economies and in recording and sharing information concerning the different types of crime and disorder that are committed against these businesses. The second part of the article considers the strengths and effectiveness of the information sharing practices and resources employed by the partnership and the benefits that they offer to its members. The article then concludes by considering the implications of the findings and identifying a number of areas that require further examination.

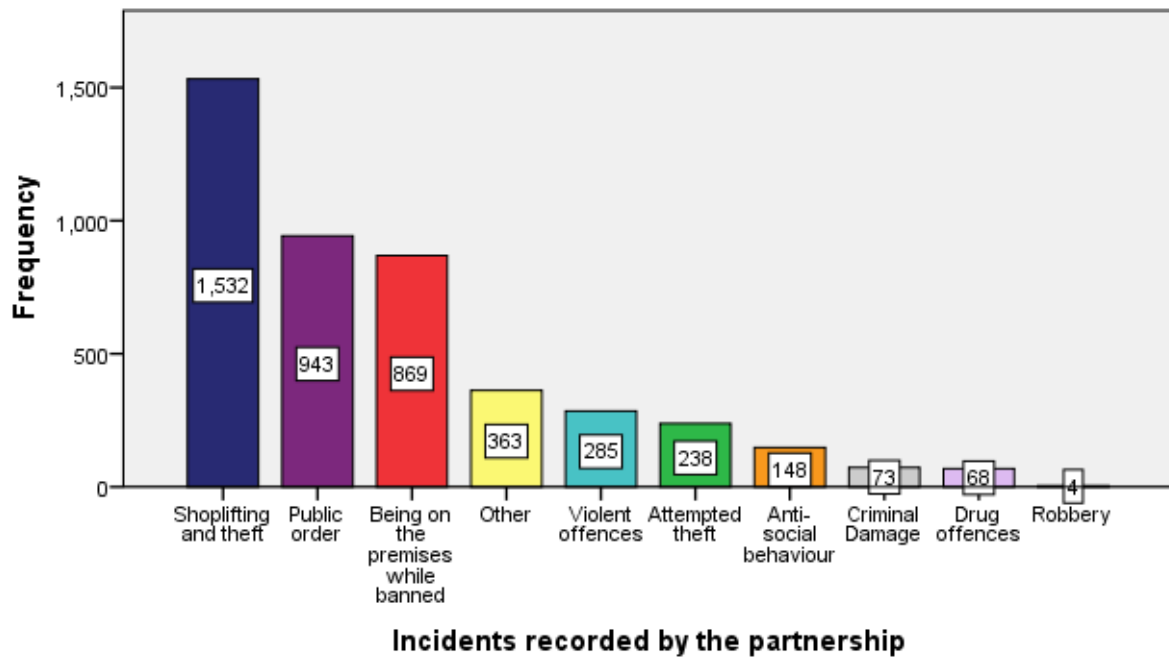
Methodology

This study is a mixed-method analysis of two data sources collected as part of a broader examination of the partnership that began in 2014 (Stafford and Hobson, 2018). The first data source is a record of every crime, incident and event reported to the partnership that, according to the partnership, constitutes an offence for which a yellow or red card sanction can be issued (listed at Table 1). In this article, these are referred to as 'offences', and include both illegal activities and behaviours deemed to be unacceptable by the partnership. Spanning 1st June 2014 to 31st May 2017, the dataset contains records from 3138 reports concerning 4523 offences committed by 1433 offenders at around 90 member locations. This database contains information on: type of offence; the time, date and location of the offence; and details of the individual(s) who committed the offence (referred to as the offender). As part of this research, the offences were organised into crime and associated behaviour categories that overlap with police crime recording classifications (illustrated at Table 1) and then analysed using descriptive statistics. The partnership's own classification categories of 'being on the premises while banned' (used by the partnership when an excluded individual entered a member premises) and 'attempted theft' were retained in this process. The number of offences recorded by the partnership in each of these categories is illustrated at Figure 1.

Table 1: Offence classifications used in this research and by the Gloucester City Safe partnership

Offence classifications used in this research	Police recorded crime data classification	Gloucester City Safe offence classification
Anti-social behaviour	Anti-social behaviour	Begging Begging persistent Kerb crawling Noise nuisance Rough sleeping Street drinking
Attempted theft		Attempted theft
Being on the premises while banned		Being on the premises while banned
Criminal damage	Criminal damage and arson	Criminal damage/Graffiti/Vandalism
Drug offences	Drugs	Possession of drugs Possession with intent to supply drugs
Other	Other crime Vehicle crime Burglary Possession of weapons	Breach of police bail Breach of Section 35 (was 27) dispersal order Going equipped to steal Hate crime Illegal gambling Inappropriate sexual contact Infringement/Breach of ASBO Joyriding Misuse of ID Other Possession of an offensive weapon Racial abuse Section 35 dispersal issued Smoking, underage or in prohibited area Underage intoxication Unlicensed street trading Unlicensed taxi cab
Public order	Public order	Drunken and disorderly behaviour Harassment/Threatening behaviour Verbal abuse
Robbery	Robbery	Robbery
Shoplifting and theft	Bicycle theft Other theft Shoplifting Theft from person	Theft
Violent offences	Violence and sexual offences	Assault violence affray

Figure 1: The offences recorded by the partnership between 1st June 2014 and 31st May 2017.



The second data source consists of semi-structured interviews with the businesses involved in the partnership conducted during annual data collection phases between 2014 and 2017. During a data collection phase, members were informed that researchers would be visiting their premises on a particular date with the aim of interviewing an employee concerning their experience of being involved in the partnership. A member would decide whether they wished to participate in the research and, if so, which employee would be interviewed. Through this approach interviews were conducted in October 2014 (n=31), October 2015 (n=41), October 2016 (n=35) and October 2017 (n=42) totalling 149 interviews. The businesses interviewed varied each year, with some members being interviewed during only one data collection phase and others during more than one phase.

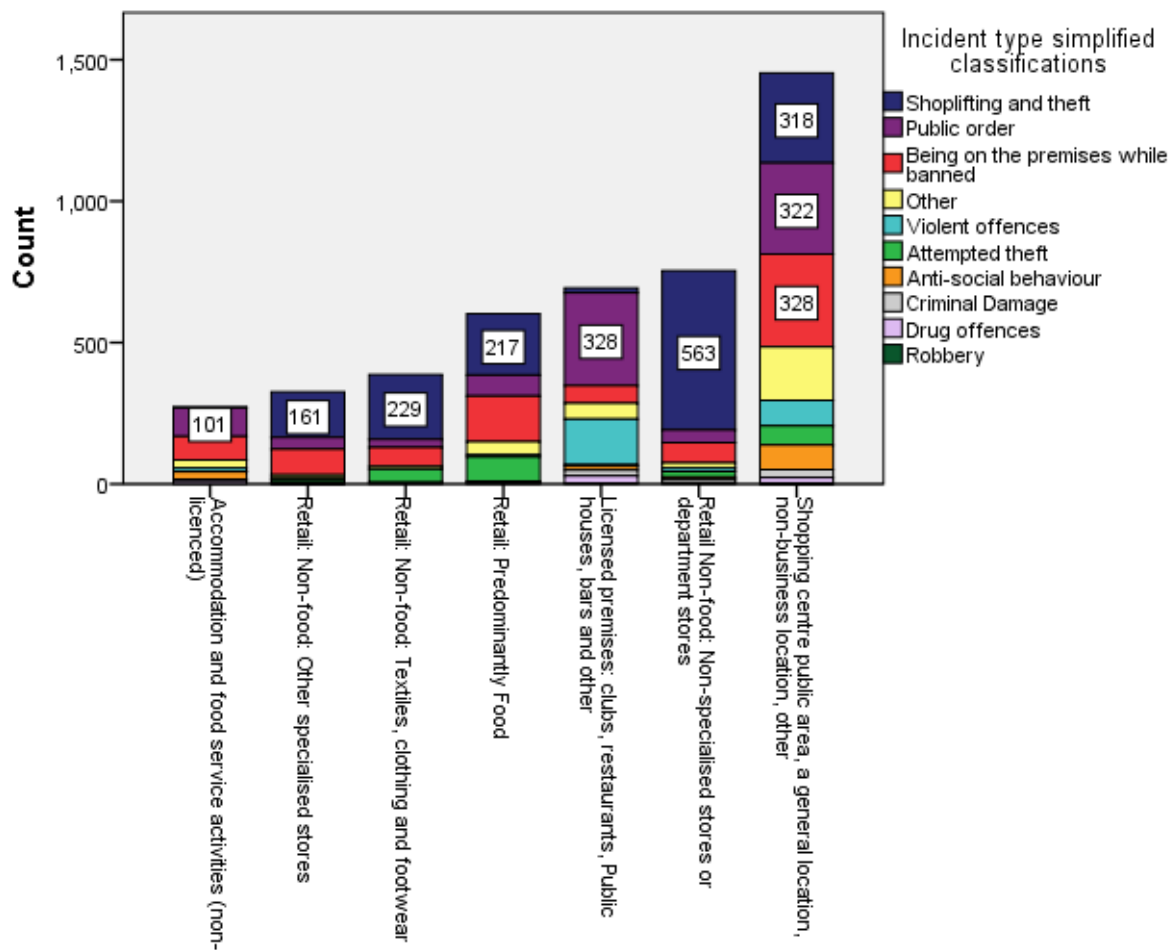
The focus of the interviews remained consistent across the data collection phases. An employee representing a business was asked questions concerning their experience of being part of the partnership, its effectiveness, strengths and limitations, the benefits it offers, and the ways in which it could be improved. All businesses involved in the partnership were organised into Standard Industrial Classifications used by Companies House (2015, listed at Table 2) to preserve participant anonymity and facilitate an examination of offences committed against different types of business. In addition to the nine classifications used in the SIC framework, a further category was added to capture offences that were recorded in other locations such as shopping centre public areas. Interview participants were given unique three-part participant codes. These codes contain a number indicating (1) the year in which the interview was conducted, (2) the unique identifier given to a business when included in this research, and (3) the Standard Industrial Classification (Companies House, 2015) under which a business was classified (illustrated at Table 2). Interviews were transcribed and analysed using inductive and deductive Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The

total number of offences that occurred at each type of member location (according to Standard Industrial Classifications) and the number of different offence types is shown at Figure 2.

Table 2: Business types organised by Standard Industrial Classifications

Number used in this article	Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)
1	Retail: Predominantly Food
2	Retail Non-food: Non-specialised stores or department stores
3	Retail Non-food: Textiles, clothing and footwear
4	Retail Non-food: Household goods stores
5	Retail Non-food: Other specialised stores
6	Retail: Non-store retailing
7	Retail: Automotive fuel
8	Accommodation and food service activities (non-licenced)
9	Licenced premises: clubs, restaurants, Public houses, bars and other
10	Shopping centre public area, other (category added to capture other offences recorded by the partnership)

Figure 2: Business type and volume/type of offence



The holistic approach to membership and focus

By design, the Gloucester City Safe BCRP advocates that there is greater value in bringing together all types of businesses and issuing sanctions that apply to all member premises rather than separating activity by day time/night time, by commercial sector, or by type of crime. Its members, many of whom were involved in the previous initiatives in the city, were very positive about the partnership and the approach that it employs. Indeed, positive sentiments about the BCRP were expressed in 141 of the 149 interviews undertaken with members. For example:

It's had quite a dramatic impact on the business. It's one of the first schemes to actually work (2014.17.2)

We are happy with it ... it's certainly working and, you know, it's a great deterrent. (2015.49.2)

It's the most positive scheme that we have ever had in Gloucester ... and [it] seems to have a positive impact on reducing crime (2016.17.2)

I've been part of other schemes and they've been a bit shocking, but I think [Gloucester City Safe is] better (2017.43.3)

Involvement in community crime reduction efforts can strengthen public bonds and stimulate community cohesion for residents of a particular area (Hope, 1995; Crawford, 1998). Similarly, within the context of this business community, a recurring theme throughout the interviews was the strong sense of community cohesion that came with membership of the partnership:

We are part of a community with it and know the other stores (2014.72.9)

*We feel like we're a part of a very special group in the sense that, you know, we're a part of all the local traders
(2015.90.2)*

*It ... shows people that we work together and that it's not an individual going out on a limb saying "you're barred"
(2016.63.9)*

[The scheme] makes it more of a community amongst the shops that are part of it (2017.84.5)

Throughout these accounts were references to the value of commercial businesses that operate in the day time, the night time, and across different sectors coming together to form a collective community focused on increasing safety and reducing crime and associated behaviours. Such accounts were from members operating across these different trading environments and commercial sectors:

it's a case of amalgamating daily business and night time economy together...it's a lot easier with City Safe, a lot quicker (2014.53.9)

Everywhere keeps in contact with each other. Like if you're a day time trader or a night time trader everyone's constantly keeping in contact, so everyone knows what's going on at the same time (2015.40.9)

What's good about this is it involves the police a lot more. Its multiple agencies (2016.14.9)

We know that the whole of the high street is dealing with this and the whole of the high street is sort of standing together (2017.37.8)

Although there were widespread positive sentiments expressed by members concerning the partnership's approach, these accounts in isolation are not sufficient evidence that the holistic model genuinely outperforms its more narrowly focused predecessors. Further analysis is required to consider whether those involved in the partnership are being targeted by the same offenders and are falling victim to the same kind of offences, and, therefore, whether there is value in sharing information concerning these matters.

Analysis of the partnership's offence data provides valuable insight in to this. 3050 offences were committed during the day time economy trading hours (6am – 6pm) by 1007 individuals and 1473 during the night time economy trading hours (6pm – 6am) by 551 individuals. Of those who committed more than one offence, 21% (125/608) committed offences during both day time trading hours (6am – 6pm) and night time trading hours (6pm – 6am). Of the same group of offenders, 251 offended in just the day time and 231 in just the night time. Although most offenders tended to commit offences during just one of these two time periods, this analysis suggests that there is value in business that operate in the day time and the night time sharing information about the individuals who offend within their premises, as in a minority of instances these businesses are falling victim to offences committed by the same people.

Companies House Standard Industrial Classification categories (2015) were used to consider the extent to which the same offenders are targeting multiple types of commercial businesses. The analysis demonstrated that of those who committed more than one offence, 39% (237/608) committed an offence against more than one type of business. Many offenders were committing offences against a range of different types of businesses (illustrated at Table 3). This suggests that there is value in different types of businesses sharing information about the individuals that commit offences on their premises. However, only 6% (34/608) offenders committed offences in both licenced premises and retail establishments, suggesting that the large majority of offenders tended to concentrate their behaviour in one or the other.

Table 3: Types of business and offending activity

Number of different types of businesses that an offender committed an offence against (according to SIC classifications)	Number of offenders who committed offences against this many different types of businesses
7	1
6	9
5	21
4	35
3	43
2	128

Another characteristic of the partnership's approach was the broad range of offence types that it recorded and tried to tackle. To examine the value of this, consideration was given to whether repeat offenders were committing a range of offence types, and, if so, whether there were benefits in this information being shared between members. Of those that committed more than 1 offence, 78% (476/608) of these offenders committed more than one type of offence (illustrated at Table 4). This analysis suggests that there is value in bring together the information concerning the crimes and associated behaviours considered by the partnership. Although certain members may be less likely to fall victim to particular types of offences, it possible that they will be targeted by the same offenders and therefore will benefit from information on these individuals. Focusing on and sharing information across these offence types, therefore, will help to construct a more complete picture of the offences committed against businesses. Not only was there a majority of offenders that were committing more than one type of offence, there was also diversity in the types of offence combinations committed by these individuals. For example, there were 41 offenders who committed both acts of 'shoplifting and theft' and 'violent offences', 109 offenders who committed acts of 'shoplifting and theft' and 'public order' offences, 15 offenders who committed acts of 'shoplifting and theft' and 'criminal damage', and 15 offenders who committed acts of 'shoplifting and theft' and 'drug offences'. This variation adds further weight to the argument that there is value in information concerning all these offence types being combined.

Table 4: Types of offences and frequency of offending activity

Number of different types of offences committed by an offender	Number of offenders that committed this number of different offences
8	3
7	8
6	5
5	30
4	56
3	108
2	266

The partnership's approach to information sharing

The collection and sharing of information concerning offences, offenders, risks and threats is a fundamental part of the model employed by the Gloucester City Safe BCRP. A commonly employed means for sharing this type of information among shop-watch or pub-watch crime reduction partnerships is the use of a radio network for members often linked to local security, CCTV operators and the local police. Replicating this, members of the Gloucester City Safe BCRP all have access to a radio network, which is used to inform others immediately when an incident of note occurs or when a repeat offender has been spotted by a member. Local police and CCTV operators and private security based in the vicinity also have access to this radio network. This was identified as an important tool for information sharing:

It keeps everyone in the loop (2014.32.10)

I think it's really good. It just helps communications between all the different pubs and businesses. It helps to make sure we can communicate if there is any trouble (2015.91.9)

It's given us a better communication avenue. It's not just "come help, come help, come help, come help", but actually "we support you, you support us", and the community has that relationship which I think is very good (2016.37.8)

There is someone at the end of the radio if we need help ... like, for safety and security (2017.89.1)

In addition to these commonly deployed tools, Gloucester City Safe makes use of newer technology to improve information sharing and access. Details concerning offenders and offending were reported directly the partnership's manager via email, the secure website, or a mobile app. All members receive weekly email communications that: summarise the offences recorded over the week; highlight the most prolific offenders during that time period by circulating images and descriptions; promote any success stories or significant achievements made by the partnership; and inform members of any changes to practice or process. Members can also access the secure web platform at any time and view a list of all offences and view galleries of those who are offending most in particular localities or who are engaging in particular behaviours. Members were highly positive about the value of these resources, and 126 of the 149 respondents stated that these tools had helped them identify individuals who had committed offences against one or more of the partnership's members previously:

You're more aware of what's going on around. You know about issues before they happen to you (2015.92.2)

We've found that here we have less of it [offences] now especially now we know the faces of people (2016.47.3)

We know who we need to look out for and what is going on around us, in other stores nearby (2017.1.1)

It's easy to see who you need to be looking for. It's easy to see what they've done. It's good to get pictures of faces, because without it I wouldn't know who to look for and they'd slip under the radar (2017.66.5)

Hamel and Brown (2017) note how challenges surrounding data sharing have hampered community safety partnerships. The comments from members included above suggest that Gloucester City Safe's approach to data sharing is not hampered by such challenges, and specifically that this approach facilitates high levels of awareness among members concerning individual offenders. The offence data recorded by the partnership offered further insight in to this matter. If an offender had received an exclusion from all member premises and then subsequently entered a different member premise this was recorded by the partnership as an offence under the classification of 'being on the premises while banned'. This could be recorded in isolation, if an excluded offender was spotted and asked to leave a member's premises, or could be coupled with another offence, if an excluded offender entered a premise and committed a further offence at the same time. There were 869 instances of 'being on the premises while banned' that were recorded by the partnership, committed by 190 individuals. Seventy-six of these individuals were reported as 'being on the premises while banned' at more than one member location. In these instances information had been shared between members successfully as for this to occur, a member would have made use of the shared information platform, learned that an exclusion had been issued to an individual by another member of the partnership, noted the excluded offender's appearance and description, remained vigilant in case the offender attempted to enter their own premises, and identified them either during or after their entry to the premises based on the information shared through the partnership.

Although it is apparent that this approach has led to members being more informed about the activity of those who have offended elsewhere, consideration should also be given to whether access to this information can be associated with a reduction in the offences committed by these individuals. Of the 869 incidents of 'being on the premises while banned' that were recorded by the partnership, 395 (45.5%) occurred in isolation (which could indicate a member spotting an offender, intervening and enforcing the exclusion before a further offence could occur) and 474 (54.5%) were coupled with a further offence. This suggests that despite the high degree of awareness that the partnership's approach can facilitate there are factors present that are preventing this information leading to the prevention of some offences. This could arise from various causes, including a lack of willingness among some members to engage with the material, or a failure on the part of recipients of the information to disseminate the materials to all their colleagues. However, even if these behaviours do not occur, other factors such as an employee's willingness to act upon the information that they receive or to confront potentially aggressive excluded offenders could also be present here. These final issues add another tier to the challenges around information sharing that such partnerships can encounter, and all require further examination.

Conclusion

This article contributes to understanding of crime against businesses and concerning the value and effectiveness of a holistic BCRP model for tackling such behaviours. There is value in bringing together businesses from a range of commercial trade types and with different trading hours to share information about offenders and offending. There are individuals who offend across the parameters of day time/night time trading hours, who target more than one type of business and who commit more than one type of crime or associated behaviour. Sharing information can offer valuable insight concerning these individuals and the offences that they commit and help inform and support a partnership's collective efforts to reduce

this offending behaviour. However, it is important to acknowledge that it is a minority of individuals who offend across these parameters. There were particularly low numbers of individuals who offended at both licenced and retail businesses. It is important, therefore, that information sharing platforms used by such partnerships facilitate the necessary search and filter functions that allow members to view those that offend most frequently as well as those who only offend at particular times of day, who target particular types of businesses or who commit particular types of crimes.

The approach employed by the Gloucester City Safe partnership appeared to offer a number of further benefits. Members were positive about the partnership's integrated, holistic model and many noted the sense of community cohesion that arose from all types of businesses being part of the partnership. The approach to information sharing and the tools employed here were held in high regard by members, and there were many reports of increased awareness of offenders as a result of the online platform, emails and radio network. Challenges around data sharing did not appear to come from the functionality of the platform itself or the information that was shared on the platform, but are more likely to arise from other issues such as engagement by members, dissemination among colleagues and willingness to act upon information.

The findings presented in this article are valuable for a number of reasons. Although there are clearly many advocates of the approach employed by Gloucester City Safe, the authors could not find other studies that have recognised this approach as distinct from that of other crime reduction partnerships and examined aspects of it in detail. The need for such examination is amplified by the general void in the academic literature in this field (Hopkins and Gill, 2017) and the call for partnerships adhering to the National Business Crime Centre's BCRP National Standards (2017) to evidence their approach to and effectiveness in the areas of partnership working and communication. Moreover, tackling some of the challenges identified by Homel and Brown (2017) and Houghton (2012) surrounding data sharing among those involved in crime reduction partnerships seems entirely plausible through the platform employed by the Gloucester City Safe partnership. Finally, these findings also have relevance to debates surrounding local accountability for crime reduction (Gilling, 2008) and locally agreed strategic approaches to tackling integrated offender management (Lane and Kangulec, 2012).

This article has examined some of the fundamental characteristics of the approach employed by the Gloucester City Safe BCRP but has paid less attention to critically assessing other important aspects of its focus and operation. For example, although initiatives such as this are primarily concerned with tackling illegal activity, they appear to exercise significant discretion when it comes to identifying the types of behaviours that they monitor, record, and attempt to mitigate. In the case of Gloucester City Safe, this has also resulted in the conflation of illegal activity and other behaviours that can occur in public spaces that members might find frustrating. A second issue concerns some of the more negative issues that can arise from economic success and higher levels of public use. There may well be a conflict for businesses, for example, between a thriving night time economy and dealing with some of the problematic and illegal behaviours that can arise from this. Although exploring these issues lies outside the scope of this particular article, their further examination will prove important to both the academic literature and the development of policy and practice.

There are limitations to this research which should be acknowledged here. Firstly, the offence data held by the partnership only captures what is reported and recorded. Although the use of this data offers a unique insight in to crime and associated behaviour committed against businesses in a number of contexts, and captures much that police recorded crime data will not, these data do not represent a complete picture of crime and disorder against businesses in the locations considered here. Secondly, a single representative of a partnership member was interviewed each year, meaning that the views of the business as a whole will not have been captured and that there could have been variation in the views attributed to a particular

partnership member across multiple years caused by a change in the participant rather than a change in overall experience between data collection phases. Finally, this article has only considered particular aspects of the approach employed by the partnership: i.e. the extent to which there is value in integrating efforts to tackle a range of types of crime that occur at different times of day and are committed against different types of businesses, and the effectiveness of the partnership's approach to information sharing. Other fundamental characteristics of the approach, such as the effectiveness of the sanctions used by the partnership, and the extent to which the warning/exclusion approach employed here actively reduces crime and encourages desistance from such behaviours rather than causing the displacement of such activity, will be considered by the authors in a forthcoming article. This analysis will also offer insight in to the offending behaviour of prolific offenders, the spatial and temporal dimensions of their activity as captured by the partnership's data and the learning that this can offer in to businesses crime reduction activity.

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