



Southampton Business Improvement District Limited

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Michael Lane Esq.  
Police & Crime Commissioner for Hampshire  
St George's Chambers  
St George's Street  
Winchester  
Hampshire  
SO23 8AJ

28<sup>th</sup> January 2020

Dear Mr Lane,

GO! Southampton is the Business Improvement District (BID) for the city of Southampton. Our organisation started work in April 2017 and has just reached the mid-point of its five-year term. We represent some 650 businesses in the city centre. There are now some 330 BIDs across the country in neighbourhoods, towns, cities and industrial estates.

As part of its 'Great City Centre Experience' theme, GO! Southampton committed to improving safety in the city centre, working in partnership with the Police and City Council. In our recent business crime survey, however, some 70% of respondents indicated that fear of crime was a significant issue, as compared to a figure of 13% in 2016. Moreover 63% of respondents indicated that, over the last 12 months, at least one member of their staff had been victims of assault. At the same time the Police's own statistics are showing that Southampton's crime rate has gone up for the fifth year in a row, is significantly higher than the average crime rate across similar areas in the country and is the highest in Hampshire. People will not come to the city centre to work, shop, eat or be entertained if it is unsafe or perceived to be unsafe.

We believe that a key reason for this situation is the inadequate allocation of police resource in our BID area and, indeed, in the city as a whole. While we understand that the county will receive a share of the Prime Minister's promised 20,000 new officers, we have no reason to believe either that a sufficient proportion of these will come to Southampton, nor that the total numbers will bring us anywhere close to 2009 numbers – a level that might be considered adequate.

We have begun to capture victim impact statements from our businesses to showcase the impact crime and anti-social behaviour is having on the workforce in the city, and to have it accepted as a priority by the police. I attach extracts from some of them with this letter. I am sure

you will agree that they make for depressing reading. (We will be sending the signed originals to the city police.)

Our specific concerns are as follows:

- Violence (and the threat of it) against customer-facing staff. On a national level assaults and threats committed against the wholesale and retail sector increased almost three-fold from 524 incidents per 1,000 premises in 2016 to 1,588 in 2018 according to the Home Office's Commercial Victimisation Survey (CVS). The British Retail Consortium's (BRC) Retail Crime survey (2019) recorded more than 42,000 violent incidents across the industry in 2018. This equates to 115 shop workers being physically attacked every day, with many more verbally abused and threatened. The Co-op reports that, in the first 90 days of 2019, more than 2,500 incidents took place in their stores, 650 of which involved violence. Although business crime is not disaggregated any more in the statistics, there were some 97 incidents of violence and sexual offences in Bargate ward (which covers most of the city centre) in October 2019. In the city overall, as you know, there was a significant rise in serious violence in 2019, with a corresponding rise in the possession of offensive weapons and the exploitation of vulnerable individuals.
- Significant increase in shoplifting. In its impact statement a prominent takeaway says this is happening 'about twenty times a day' and that the perpetrators will not return stock when challenged. Similar stories are wearily familiar to us. It is clear that a 'tipping point' has been reached, where criminals can act without fear of any consequences. One of our large national retailers has moved into the top 25 most affected by shoplifting countrywide, with stock loss now totalling £860k per annum – an incredible 2% of turnover.
- Massive degradation and decline in the overall street scene, including the following:
  - Individuals openly consuming/injecting drugs in plain sight of shoppers, and then leaving the detritus behind.
  - Uncontrolled begging, often aggressive.
  - Rampant anti-social behaviour ("screaming, shouting and swearing").
  - Intimidation of staff trying to challenge those blocking doorways and fire escapes

In the early days of the BID one of our board members, Parkhouse Jewellers, was forced to relocate to Westquay because customers were no longer willing to run the gauntlet of aggressive beggars.



As a BID we have an excellent relationship with our city police, to the extent that we are collaborating to organise a Serious Violence Conference for the city in February. From the outstanding commander downwards, we believe there is not a single officer who is not fully committed to addressing the issues we've mentioned; however they simply do not have enough people to be effective. Specifically,

- The police often fail to attend reported incidents. A female staff member at a department store was assaulted by a shoplifter, causing a split lip and bruising. Although the offender was detained for twenty minutes, they were eventually released on police advice as no unit could attend. A similar incident is quoted in the impact statements.
- The police often fail to follow up on reported incidents. Another of our board member's premises – a famous nightclub in the city – was recently subject to a break-in. Our board member gathered CCTV evidence, identified the perpetrators and even gathered blood samples. The cost of the damage was £20,000. The police failed to act.
- The police are rarely visible on city centre streets. This removes the only truly effective deterrent to the endemic 'street scene' issues mentioned above. We also find that repeat offenders are able to ignore banning orders with impunity.
- We encourage our businesses to report crimes/offences, but this is becoming increasingly difficult as they lose confidence in the police through perceived inaction.

In response to the level of crime the BID has been compelled to implement a number of measures of its own:

- We funded Operation Bulkhead and Operation Refract. Regrettably there were not enough officers willing to fill the overtime hours.
- We appointed the former city centre sergeant to enhance crime reporting, target prolific offenders and improve relations between the police and our businesses. 20 convictions have resulted to date.
- Following unsuccessful discussions with Hampshire Constabulary as to our funding additional PCSOs in the city, we recently recruited three on-street security officers to complement our three existing street rangers. While we have resisted this step for a long time, it represents a last-ditch response to the lack of police. The security officers are intended both to reassure our businesses and to deter criminals.

All of these measures are expensive and deplete the resources available for positive initiatives, such as marketing, events, placemaking and animation. More significantly, as the impact statements show, inadequate policing levels are leading to significant loss of business, the



degradation of the image of the city (including among cruise ship passengers and crew) and a barrage of complaints from customers and traders. It is hard to see how the city can make a bid to be UK City of Culture when it cannot even offer a decent city-centre experience.

The BID itself was balloted into existence in 2016 on the understanding that things would get better. The £6m-worth of investment we bring is under threat should businesses decide – in our 2021 renewal ballot – that there has been no meaningful response to rampant crime.

The national Serious Violence and Organised Crime Strategy in 2018 has, as a key objective, 'building the highest levels of defence and resilience for businesses, removing vulnerabilities in our systems and organisations, and giving criminals fewer opportunities to target and exploit'. Until the levels of policing in the city centre are increased to 2009 levels we have no faith that this objective can be met.

I would be very keen to meet with you and senior officers to discuss these issues and to find ways in which, in partnership, we can move forward together to address them.

Yours sincerely,



Giles Semper  
Executive Director

Cc Chief Constable Olivia Pinckney  
Superintendent Kelly Whiting  
Tim Keeping, Chair, GO! Southampton  
Sandeep Sesodia, Chair, Southampton Connect & Chair, Southampton Business Strategy Board, Hampshire Chamber of Commerce  
Cllr Christopher Hammond, Leader, Southampton City Council  
Sandy Hopkins, Chief Executive, Southampton City Council  
Dan Fitzhenry, Leader of the Conservative Group, Southampton City Council  
Rt Hon Priti Patel MP, Home Secretary  
Rt Hon Royston Smith MP



## Extracts from Impact Statements

*These statements were gathered by GO! Southampton in the summer and autumn of 2019. The signed originals will be shared with the city constabulary.*

(Facilities Manager, Cultural institution)

“On a daily basis we experience:

- Aggressive begging
- Drug dealing / usage around our buildings (sharps)
- Homeless people using drugs and erecting temporary shelters

“The effect this has on my staff and customers is:

- Customers aggressively targeted on a daily basis by beggars in [name of street]- made to feel guilty for enjoying a night out.
- Drug deals (Many have been reported to Hampshire Constabulary – no known action taken) & drug usage around our buildings – makes staff feel unsafe at work.
- Sharps often left in public areas (doorways/stairwells) which is a risk to children in the neighbouring area.”

(Security Guard, Retail)

“On a daily basis we experience theft and drug use. Drug paraphernalia is left after use. Drug taking is often in full view of public on ... Street. They use our facilities to clean themselves. Also sleeping and setting up home in car park stairwells.

“The effect this has on my staff and I is being pulled away from dealing with more important situations, often putting a strain on available members of staff.”

(Security Guard, Retail)

“On a daily basis we experience anti-social and aggressive behaviour, drug use, theft, verbal abuse to us and customers. They leave drug paraphernalia around the site which is a serious concern to us as it is a family environment. When the shoplifters are caught, some of them are compliant and some are threatening towards us.

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“The effect this has on my staff and I is taking us away from some duties and getting areas cleared and cleaned, the abuse and threats made by some towards us is a big concern.”

(Store Manager, Retail)

“On a daily basis we will have two or more beggars asking people for money from opening time to closing time with perhaps a half hour of grace between. The continuously harass my customers and staff and this is really intimidating. If asked to move they become aggressive and refuse saying we can't touch them. If our security isn't attentive enough they will frequently come in and steal stock as well... When I last checked we were getting about six customer complaints every hour. This is unacceptable. At least two or three customers per day tell me they will not return.

“...There seems little point in reporting matters as the police do not turn up ... We know that images of incidents at our doors are recorded on Council CCTV and that these can be patched through to police, yet still no response. A while ago we had to ring 999 for a very heated aggressive couple having an altercation outside. The police said they had received other calls and police were on their way. No-one ever arrived.

“We are even obliged to employ full-time security guards on our doors – obviously an additional cost.

“...The current retail climate is exceptionally difficult for a number of reasons ... The situation is intolerable and it's about time the matter was seriously addressed by the bodies responsible whether that is council, police or whatever.”

Store Manager, Retail

“On an almost daily basis we will have one or two beggars outside the doors asking for money or specific items such as a sandwich. If I ask them to move or to stop begging I am told I cannot move them on as this is “harassment” and that they are entitled to ‘earn a living’ however they choose. They can be quite aggressive in their response too. In fact they threaten me with calling the police!”

“The problem is made worse by the fact that we have a cash machine outside. The beggars are often loitering on the shoulders of customers and we have had an incident of money snatched

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from the machine by the beggar and refusing to hand it back. This turned into a public order situation and I rang 999. The police never actually attended.”

Store Manager, Retail

“We recently had three males enter the store. Two distracted me whilst a third stole a high value product. I recognised them as local ‘down and outs’ as they had tried the day before... We have taken to locking and unlocking the entry door after each customer so they can’t get in again. However this is a real inconvenience...”

“I often see two parking attendants patrol the parking bays outside the shop but never a policeman.

“We were broken into once. The rear of the shop was damaged and I attended on my own at 11 o’clock at night. No police ever arrived to assist me.

“Overall the situation is getting worse and something needs to be done.”

Store Manager, Retail

“I am making this statement to record the huge problem we have in store with shop theft, begging, verbal abuse, intimidation, purse thefts and harassment.

“On a daily basis we get a call from the shop floor for a theft or fraud at the till. This shop is run by volunteers who do their best to look after the place but they are clearly not trained to deal with crime and confrontation. If I challenge one of our criminals I am often threatened and one of them threatened to “stick me” with a needle because I asked for our stock back.

“This city has so much to offer and we are being let down by the poor state of the street scene and the crime and anti-social behaviour. There are beggars and rough sleepers in almost every doorway; something really needs to be done.

“... We actually have some rather nice stock donated to us... We simply cannot put these items on display because of the shoplifting and street people.”

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Store Manager, Takeaway

“Over recent months the situation has become almost intolerable. On a daily basis we have a beggar sat right outside my doors harassing customers. They regularly change so there is someone there all day. I ask them to move on and just end up in an argument. Friends of the beggar, our regular, enter the store and steal food and just give it to the beggar.

“A while away we could challenge them and they would return the items. Now they tell me to “F\*\*k off” and throw an item such as BBQ sauce at me like last week. I think we get someone stealing about twenty times a day; this equates to something like £200-£300 per week, minimum. This has a direct impact on our viability as a business.

“We have to be vigilant all the time. It’s not nice to come to work and feel threatened. The thieves become aggressive shouting at me and my colleagues. I have been verbally threatened numerous times. One chap was bouncing around the store and I made to call the police. He said he would wait for me after work. He didn’t, but I shouldn’t have to put up with it.

“Last week we had a huge row between the homeless outside my doors. Two got started and several more arrived. It was quite frightening. We had a family in the shop too frightened to leave. We called the police as did several other people. The police never arrived and my colleague didn’t get a call back either. I am convinced that the lack of consequence for these criminal acts is making the situation worse.

“We even call the police for assaults and they take an age to arrive. By which time it’s always over. We had a violent offender arrested from our store last year. He had been stealing from customers in my shop! Five policeman arrived once he got violent and kindly strapped him up and took him away. He was back in the following week. My colleague phoned the police and the advice was to lock the store with the man inside! We didn’t of course and the police never arrived anyway. He eventually left.

Security Team Leader, Retail

“...I regularly walk around the city centre and I am amazed at the abandoned rucksacks everywhere. We are trained to be vigilant for terrorism reasons yet suspect bags are everywhere outside buildings and other public places. Any terrorist in this city just need to turn up as a homeless person and leave his device in his rucksack wherever he likes.

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"Then we have the shop theft. The thefts are early on, hitting [shop name] and [shop name] and jumping the barriers to steal food from [café name]. There is a clear correlation between the number of rough sleepers and theft incidents. Then they return later to take their drugs in the toilets – or they do in winter. As it's summer now they openly take drugs in the High Street often until they pass out and an Ambulance is called, sometimes 3 or 4 times a day.

"About six weeks ago [store name] had a £3k burglary. We have identified the offender on CCTV. The evidence is uncollected so far."

Store Manager, Retail

"My main issue is shop theft. [A] group sits outside our doors and await any opportunity to enter and steal my stock. This happens almost every day. If we are paying close attention we can deter the thieves. However, sometimes they are drunk/drugged and aggressive. A couple of weeks ago we had a real confrontation with one of our 'regulars' plus one other. He was really threatening and offensive and even spat on one of my female staff members before leaving.

"Unfortunately any police response to our calls is negligible. I think I have had police attend twice in four years, not matter how serious the event might be. The thieves fully understand that the police will not attend, they are not coming and therefore the thefts continue and overall get worse."

Store Manager, Retail

"We have the regulars who are repeat offenders for example [name of individual] who comes in daily stealing whatever he can, openly intimidating us by standing outside the store. ... Most recent on [date] we had [name of individual] filling up his coat with our stock. We approached him to get our items back and he swore and attempted to hit one of my staff resulting in us letting him take the goods. We reported it [crime reference given] but was told nothing could be done."

Store Manager, Retail

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“On one occasion a drunk or drugged male entered our store and stripped to his boxers and socks before passing out on the floor in the middle of my shop. My 16 year old assistant was absolutely terrified. I rang 999 for police and Ambulance and was asked to check if he was conscious and breathing! I wasn't going near him I'm afraid. Eventually Police and Medics arrived and persuaded him to wake up and go on his way. I had to close the shop for the best part of an hour. This is simply unacceptable.”

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