

Title:

Operation Overspill targeting robberies during the night-time economy.

Theme:

This project aimed to reduce night-time economy robberies in Bolton Town Centre.

Author and project contact person:

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Supporting agencies:

Bolton Council Licensing

Bolton Council

Endorsement from Chief Inspector Justine Topping

From: Justine Topping <Justine.Topping@gmp.police.uk>

Sent: 05 April 2023 08:23

To: Nicholas Bonson <Nicholas.Bonson@gmp.police.uk>

Subject: Tilley Awards 2023 - Application Form K

Nick,

I'm more than happy with the attached, it is an excellent piece of work.

Justine

Application summary:

Scanning: Bolton has a busy night-time economy which is concentrated on a fairly small street, Bradshawgate.

During 2022 between January and May it was noticed that the amount of robberies in the town centre had doubled. The most frequent area for these was on Bradshawgate in Bolton.

Offenders were often described as male and either acting alone or in groups. On numerous occasions knives and screwdrivers were used to threaten victims for money or jewellery.

In addition to robbery the area flagged for knife and violent crime.

Analysis: The majority of robberies were linked to Friday and Saturday nights during the night time economy hours.

Robberies were concentrated to the areas which were most busy with public houses, night clubs and the back streets near them.

Victims were normally male and were in the town centre to visit pubs and clubs.

Offenders acted in groups on 33% of occasions and were nearly always male.

There was intelligence indicating groups of males were congregating in the town centre who had not been attending any of the establishments.

Response:

- Night-time economy operation to cover peak demand hours 2300-0700, Friday and Saturday. This will be high visibility operation on foot.
- Operation to be supported with overtime from violence reduction unit – this will allow additional patrols on back streets within the town.
- Weekly meetings to discuss feedback with local authority to ensure appropriate response using partners including CCTV, Licensing, Environmental Health, Community Safety and powers under the Public Space Protection Order.
- Neighbourhood police officer support to patrol on weekday evenings.
- Upskill officers involved on legislation surrounding night- time economy.

Assessment: Over the period of 2022 there was a total 40% reduction of all robberies across the whole area for the second half of the year with the operation commencing in May.

There was an 84% reduction in robberies directly attributed to the night- time economy in the second half of the year.

There were also significant reductions in other violent offences during the period of the operation.

Word count 333

Project Description:

Scanning:

What:

During the first 5 months of 2022 there had been one less report of robbery than there had been for the entirety of 2021. Even taking Covid restrictions into account that was an unexpected increase.

The data below covers robberies from beginning of January 2022 to mid May 2022. The top incident location suggests that Bradshawgate shopping street has the highest concentration of robberies within Bolton Town Centre. Appendix 1 shows the graph detailing the disproportionate distribution of robberies across Bolton Town Centre. The graph details a pareto curve showing the distribution of robberies with the majority being committed on one street; Bradshawgate.

Appendix 2 shows a table with Bradshawgate being the location of two times the robberies of the next location so the disproportionality is clear.

When:

The robberies are generally linked to the night-time economy with offending taking place mostly at weekends in the evening and early hours. Of these, the majority are linked to Friday and Saturday nights when the night-time economy was at its busiest. This is represented as Saturday and Sunday in the data as they occur after midnight.

Appendix 3 shows the distribution for robbery crime across the days of the week, this graph shows an increase from Thursday through the weekend in line with the night time economy opening for Bolton.

There have been similarities in MOs with offenders threatening victims with knives and screwdrivers before stealing jewellery or cash. This has a significant impact on the victims targeted. Generally, but not exclusively, victims are male and offenders are nearly always male.

In 2021 there were 42 reports of robbery. So far this year there have been 41 reports. Irrespective of some of the Covid legislation at the beginning of last year this is a significant predicted increase.

Additionally, to robbery, Bolton town centre is amongst the worst beats for knife crime and violent crime.

Appendix 4 shows the distribution of temporal analysis shows hot times as being in the evening and more so on the weekends.

Where:

Bolton's town centre attracts people from all over the area when it comes to its night-time economy. The pubs and clubs that people attend in numbers are concentrated in a small area. There is one main street and a square where these are situated. The main street is called Bradshawgate. There are numerous smaller streets and alleys that run off this. In addition to pubs and clubs, there are some take aways and residential properties in the form of flats. Below is a map with the distribution of licensed premises along Bradshawgate. Appendix 5 shows a map of the area for reference.

How:

Some of the MOs matched in that knives and screwdrivers were used to threaten victims for money or jewellery. Offenders would sometimes act in groups and were generally male.

Who:

Victims are usually adult males who attended the area to visit the public houses and clubs. They tend to be younger generation in lates teens and twenties.

Key themes identified

- 50% of all robberies took place at the weekend
- 25% took place on Bradshawgate itself
- The peak times were during the night-time economy hours where clubs and take aways were open until 0600
- 33% of offences happened with more than one offender involved
- Victims were using the town centre legitimately
- There were commonalities in the types of property being stolen – jewellery and money
- There were commonalities in some MOs in that weapons (screwdrivers/knives) were being used
- Due to intoxication and speed of incidents the evidence relating to crimes was not leading to arrests/prosecutions.

The John Eck Cheers Assessment was used to identify whether this project is appropriate for a POP Plan.

CHEERS

Community-it is affecting the community who attend Bolton Town Centre, in particular those who attend Bradshawgate for the night time economy.

Harm- it is causing physical harm and emotional harm to victims. It is also impacting the feelings of safety in the area.

Events- there are an enduring series of events as documented through the graph.

Expectation- there is an expectation by the community that police would tackle the problem.

Recurring- the data shows that it is a recurring problem with the location.

Similar- it is similar in terms of the location and largely the M.O used.

Analysis:

The problem analysis triangle has been used to analyse the problem of street robberies in Bradshawgate.

Location:

The timing of offences and the concentration of licensed premises around the location is a key contributing factor to the density of offending. The night-time economy hours and the concentration of venues, means that it is a very target rich environment. Bolton Town Centre is considered to be the second option between that and Manchester City Centre for a night out. Bolton has a student population owing to the local university and it has a population of over 280,000 people. The town centre also has visitors from nearby Leigh, Wigan and other small towns.

There are several cash machines along Bradshawgate, which is the main street running through the Town Centre, which again in addition to the concentration of venues made this location opportune for offenders. As it meant ready access to the objects that they wanted: cash. Appendix 7 shows a picture of the area for reference.

As you can see from the picture in appendix 7, there are a lot of alleyways, concealed doorways and small roads which offered concealment for any offenders. The easy methods of escape also made this location opportune for offenders, in that after committing an offence there were many routes to escape the Town Centre.

After the periods of lockdown due to Covid, the town centre re-opened its night-time economy which attracted large crowds of people. This was done gradually as restrictions were lifted from having to sit at a table to being open as was the case pre Covid. There was no specific police operation re the night-time economy. Officers would respond to reports made. As such the demand was being reacted to and not prevented. This made the area a target rich zone and attracted those wanting to take advantage of this.

Victims:

In most cases, alcohol was a contributing factor. Victims had enjoyed the night-time economy venues and were rendered vulnerable due to alcohol. Victims were often alone at the time of these offences being committed and this, alongside the hours incidents occurred, meant that they were vulnerable. The alcohol may have affected their decision making regarding their own safety and being alone in the early hours within the town centre. The use of a cash machine with often hopes of flagging down a cab, meant that they were very vulnerable as victims. There was often no one to act as a guardian due to the hours that offences occurred and the victim being alone. This was backed up by vague accounts provided by victims where they sighted intoxication as a factor. Additionally, reports were often made late as the victim had either been dispossessed of their phone or did not realise the significance of what occurred. The fact that they were alone and in secluded areas was backed up by CCTV footage which saw their direction of travel around the times of offences that were reported.

Offenders:

A third of offences had more than one offender so that group dynamic would feed into this, these were more interested in watches and were generally more organised. The rest were opportunistic in nature and were using the availability of victims to their advantage. Deprivation is a considerable factor here as the area is exceptionally deprived and the offences are linked to financial gain.

The working hypothesis was that there are various offenders using the night-time economy to be able to target victims who were vulnerable due to intoxication.

Objective was to reduce robberies on Bradshawgate

Working hypothesis; that by reducing robberies on Bradshawgate, this was leading an overall reduction across Bolton Town Beat.

Response:

The response was a police lead, partnership approach utilising the 25 situational crime prevention techniques.

Location:

A police led hotspot operation which involved being within hotspots at hot times. This was done to deflect offenders with the knowledge that this tactic is evidenced to reduce crime. The creation of a night-time economy operation using officers from across the district was there to deflect offenders. Full briefing item and operation packs were created by Prevention Hub which included relevant penalty books, maps, legislation details (such as direction to leave) and intelligence.

Overtime funding secured to allow additional officers to patrol alleys and areas off the main strip. This was with the intention of accounting for those within these areas and conducting weapons sweeps. It also ensured that those who appeared vulnerable could be checked and safeguarded. Security staff at venues were also taught and encouraged on how to complete these for around their venues, this was done to increase natural surveillance, offer guardianship to victims and control access to weapons.

Natural surveillance was improved by increasing CCTV hours scheduled to cover the operation, the operators were briefed on hotspot location and times and were also trained to spot signs of vulnerability. Intelligence was shared with CCTV regarding potential offenders with operators having direct access to police radio to be able to communicate directly to ensure a quicker response.

Weekly meetings took place with Prevention Hub, licensing, town centre manager and regulatory services to discuss the operation for the previous weekend and make plans for the next. This required a joint up approach owing to alcohol being a key driver in this. Any premises being found to be overselling alcohol which would make a victim more vulnerable would be targeted. Partners were

also in a position to patrol hotspots, so a free flow of information regarding any emerging locations could be shared and a decision would be made on who would be best placed to patrol this area. Visits to licensed premises or VLPs with both Bolton Council Licensing and GMP Licensing officers was key to the promotion of the licensing objectives particularly around the sale of alcohol and to ensure that alcohol was not being sold to those intoxicated. This was around controlling alcohol and drugs as it has been identified as a key factor to the night-time economy robbery problem.

Understanding the premises where the biggest problems were coming from. This was from feedback sheets and incident reports. This allowed them to be contacted in the week by us and partners, to get extra visits on the operation and if necessary, taken to review. Doing this resulted in the closure of one establishment and another one needing to have extra door staff. By ensuring places were managed better it helped reduce vulnerability and potential victims.

Longer term information gleaned from the operation was used to target problem premises by both Bolton Council Licensing and GMP Licensing. This was in the way of licence reviews but also with partner powers including environmental health legislation. An example being that there was a takeaway which had an insecure gate. This led to a yard where people were stashing weapons. The local authority supported in ensuring this business secured their yard.

The businesses that were taken to review included both bars and take aways. One take away had been the centre for disorder after most of the bars closed. We were able to demonstrate this, and it resulted in their conditions requiring them to have door staff on.

Victims:

Plans were also put in place to create a haven staffed with medics where vulnerable people could get assistance without taking up police time or being potential targets. This was approved and a shop on the main street was converted. This offered guardianship for potential vulnerable victims and gave them a place to sober up in a safe environment and charge up their phone to find a safe way home.

Officers would patrol and refer anyone vulnerable to the haven, premises also did this also when refusing entry to anyone who had had too much to drink.

Police and Bolton Licensing worked with premises to ensure that they did this rather than sending a person who was intoxicated away and inadvertently putting them in a vulnerable position.

Offenders:

Custody briefings to ensure local cells and that relevant bail conditions were being imposed where proportionate. This was done to assist compliance and ensure that offenders were prevented from coming back to the town centre. This in essence, took away the victim rich environment for offenders.

This partnership approach and regular debriefing allowed for the response to evolve. An example of this was that we were getting information that groups of males were congregating in the early hours, using nitrous oxide, and targeting lone females.

This resulted in:

- Officer training in use of Public Space Protection Order powers. Using nitrous oxide within town centre was a breach of this and officers were given fixed penalty books to issue on spot fines of £100 for doing so.
- CCTV tasked with proactively identifying people using nitrous oxide.
- Local Authority overt CCTV van was provided for officer use, allowing it to be parked up in areas where groups congregated.
- District Tasking Team, which is a local proactive unit, were brought in to work from 0400 on weekends. This allowed fresh officers the chance to attend the town centre and assist with stop searches when often the night team would be engaged due to dealing with arrests since their start of duty.
- Targeted weapons sweeps lead to recovery of knives secreted behind bins and lamp posts.

Over a matter of weeks, it became apparent that there were less and less people congregating in such a manner as they could no longer act in the way in which they wanted.

Assessment:

The operation successfully reduced robberies linked to the night-time economy by 84% from the operation starting in May 22 to Mar 23. There was no obvious displacement of these robberies from

looking at the town centre beat as a whole and surrounding beats. The area of the night-time economy is a small one. It is not replicated anywhere else in the town. As such, even if the offenders had decided to congregate elsewhere, they would have been unable to do so in a place where there was that amount of potentially vulnerable victims. If anything, there was a diffusion of benefit owing to the operation.

Appendix 8 is a graph that demonstrates the reduction in robberies across the period on Bradshawgate. This shows that the objective was successfully met.

Appendix 9 shows an overall reduction across the beat therefore validating the working hypothesis that by reducing robberies in the hotspot of Bradshawgate, it would reduce robberies across the beat.

Additionally, there was a decrease in many crime types including assaults with injuries, sexual assaults, and spiking.

- Robbery overall reduced 40%
- Public order reduced 30%
- Assault with injury reduced 30%
- Rape reduced 28%
- Sexual offences reduced 43%
- Spiking reduced 66%
- Theft from person reduced 50%
- Possession of drugs increased 75% (due to stop search)
- Possession of weapons increased 75% (due to stop search)

The total cost of the operation to date is £160000. In addition to this is the daytime hours utilised by police and partners to plan and prepare. This has been pulled together from additional VRU funding and the duty time cost of officers.

The need for overtime has been negated with the reduction in robberies and people using the town centre for illegitimate purposes.

There were many challenges along the way. The operation required using officers on re-rostered rest days, removing them from their core roles. This was not an easy decision and one that has taken some considerable planning to ensure there are adequate staff available for daytime work plus the operation itself.

Many of the officers involved had not policed the town centre in this manner before, having been tutored under Covid. Drawing on different departments to work it has allowed for the experience to be shared out and the upskilling of those involved.

Robbery	£147600
Rape	£78720
Sexual offences	£58680
Theft from person	£16560
Violence with injury	£576050
Total	£877610
Saving (-170000 in policing/planning)	£707,610

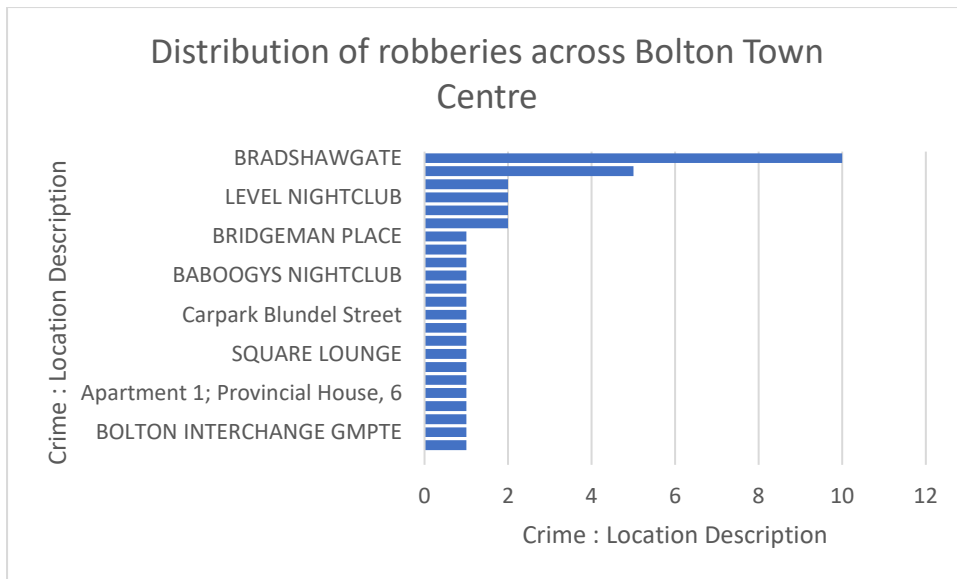
Long term, a full consultation on a night-time levy has been approved cross party, after pitching to the local authority and full council. The introduction of a levy will enable revenue to be raised towards funding the ongoing activities of both the police and council across the entire conurbation - dealing with the various challenges across the night-time economy in all districts, but aimed at the later opening venues, where hotspots or trigger points occur. In addition, the funding will also assist with additional safety schemes, for example, the safe haven, spiking campaigns, 'Get Home Safe' and 'Ask Angela Campaigns'.

In relation to the working hypothesis around alcohol being the driver and formulating an approach centre around controlling alcohol and combating the vulnerability that alcohol causes would lead to a reduction in the amount of night-time economy robberies was correct. However, the results have been far more well spread and has led to a diffusion of benefit on other crime types. In conclusion, it puts up a strong argument that alcohol was to blame or a significant contributing factor within night-time economy robberies but also other violent type offences.

Word count 2879

Appendices

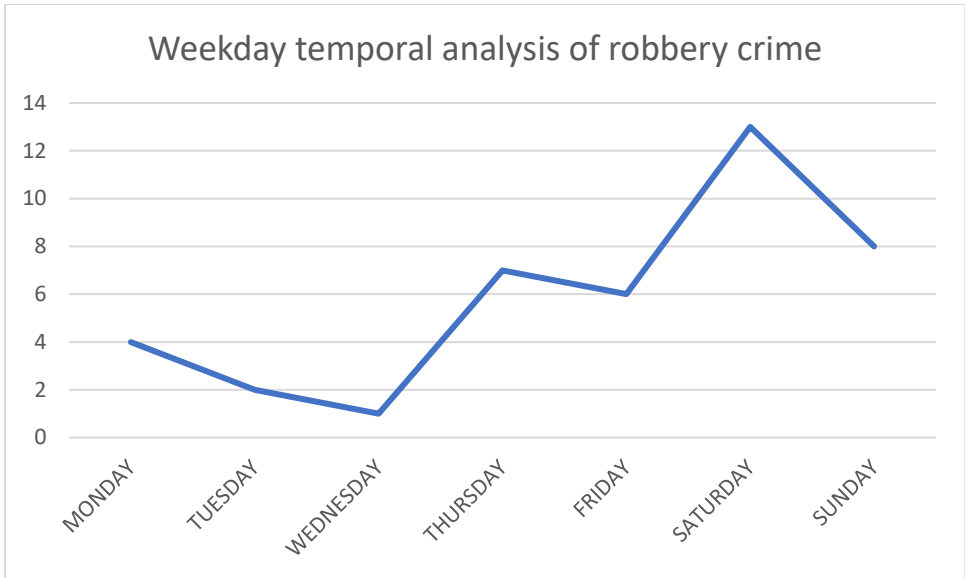
Appendix 1



Appendix 2

Row Labels	Count of Crime : Location Description
BRADSHAWGATE	10
	5
MORRISONS	2
LEVEL NIGHTCLUB	2
SAINSBURYS SUPERMARKET	2
BARCLAYS MARKET STREET	2
BRIDGEMAN PLACE	1
50	1
DERBYSTREET	1
BABOOGYS NIGHTCLUB	1
ALMA INN	1

Appendix 3



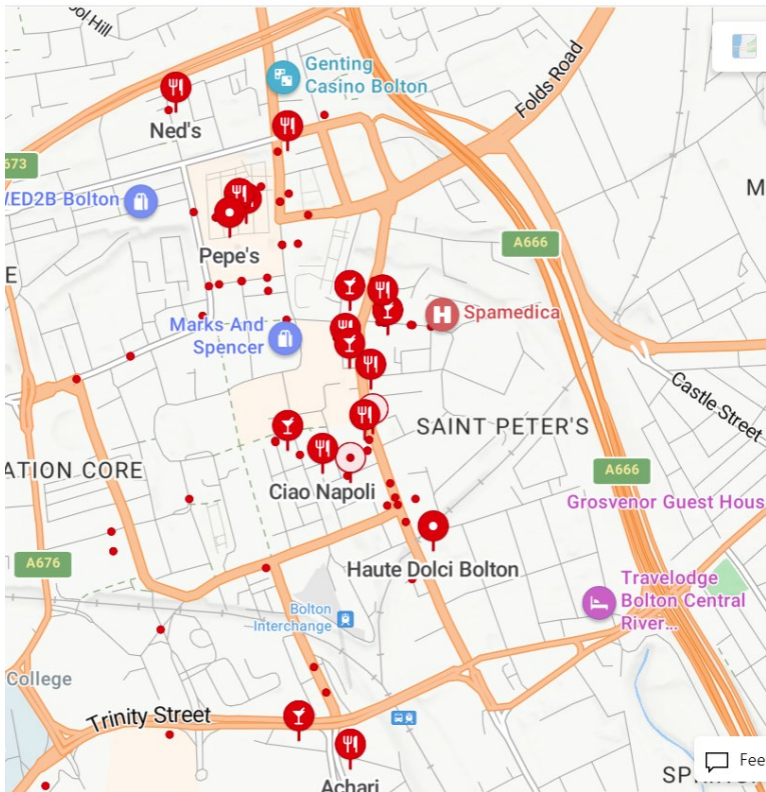
Appendix 4

Knife Crime Peak Days and Times 2021

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN	Total
0000-0100	7.00	10.00	10.00	15.00	5.00	8.00	5.00	60.00
0100-0200	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	5.00
0200-0300	0.00	1.00	2.00	4.00	2.00	3.00	2.00	14.00
0300-0400	2.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	2.00	14.00
0400-0500	4.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	1.00	3.00	12.00
0500-0600	1.00	1.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	7.00	11.00
0600-0700	1.00	3.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	6.00
0700-0800	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	5.00
0800-0900	0.00	3.00	4.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	8.00
0900-1000	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	4.00	0.00	9.00
1000-1100	4.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	0.00	2.00	2.00	12.00
1100-1200	1.00	2.00	4.00	1.00	2.00	0.00	0.00	10.00
1200-1300	1.00	2.00	4.00	7.00	1.00	4.00	4.00	23.00
1300-1400	0.00	0.00	6.00	2.00	1.00	1.00	3.00	13.00
1400-1500	1.00	5.00	4.00	2.00	2.00	5.00	4.00	23.00
1500-1600	5.00	6.00	6.00	7.00	3.00	2.00	5.00	34.00
1600-1700	2.00	3.00	3.00	0.00	3.00	0.00	4.00	15.00
1700-1800	2.00	4.00	3.00	6.00	10.00	4.00	1.00	33.00
1800-1900	6.00	3.00	4.00	6.00	8.00	6.00	2.00	38.00
1900-2000	14.00	6.00	9.00	2.00	2.00	6.00	4.00	46.00
2000-2100	7.00	11.00	1.00	4.00	7.00	4.00	1.00	35.00
2100-2200	2.00	4.00	3.00	1.00	6.00	2.00	3.00	21.00
2200-2300	6.00	4.00	3.00	4.00	6.00	5.00	1.00	29.00
2300-0000	3.00	8.00	6.00	3.00	6.00	4.00	8.00	38.00
Total	70.00	80.00	75.00	74.00	74.00	77.00	64.00	

Highest risk	
Moderately high risk	
Moderate risk	
Moderately low risk	
Lowest risk	

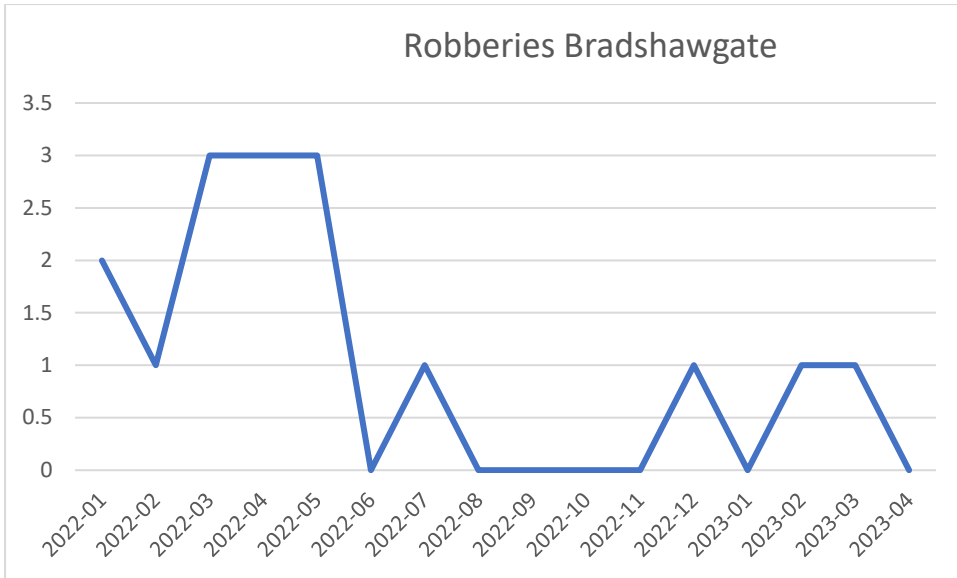
Appendix 5



Appendix 7



Appendix 8



Appendix 9

