



LIVERPOOL BID COMPANY

How Disc supports a sensitive approach to business crime reduction

For the Liverpool BID Company and the levy payers it works for, driving down low-level crime and anti-social behaviour across the city centre is a key priority. But in this traditionally generous city, the BID adopts a sensitive approach to the problems of rough sleeping, street drinking and begging...

The Liverpool BID Company manages two adjoining Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) in the city – the Retail & Leisure BID, and the Culture & Commerce BID. Together they represent more than 1,000 levy payers contributing a combined annual budget of almost £2.5m.

For that money, the company supports a wide range of services to meet the diverse needs of two very different BIDs. And ensuring a safe and secure environment for levy payers of both BIDs, their customers and their staff is a core function.

Shaun Holland joined the Liverpool BID Company as Head of Operations in 2016, after 30 years with the Met and Merseyside police. Among other responsibilities he heads up the company's environmental and safety activities, of which its crime reduction scheme is key.

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The BID: essential conduit and communicator

“We’re a conduit” says Shaun, “making sure that our levy payers’ concerns are heard by the various organisations around them that can too often seem remote and unresponsive. The BID is a communicator: to the council, to the police, to the fire service. We’re in a unique position to make our levy payers’ voice heard on issues which are of pressing concern to them, but perhaps not always top of these agencies’ priorities.”

It helps that Shaun sits on a number of boards and action groups so he can make sure levy payers’ concerns are respected and acted on. “But of course, it’s not enough just to sit there and bang your fist on the table: we need data, hard evidence, to support levy-payer’s assertions that, for example, there are increases in violent crime here or anti-social behaviour there. It’s essential that levy payers provide us with that information.”

“It’s not enough to sit there and bang your fist on the table: we need data, hard evidence”

Shaun Holland



Holland also runs a number of intelligence-sharing Watch Groups, each bringing together different communities of levy payers to share their concerns with him, and, in turn, for him to take those concerns, backed with evidence, to the council, the police, the fire service, or multi-agency groups.

These include Hotel Watch, Coffee Watch, Bet Watch, Retail and Security Watch. “It’s important that we recognise that different types of businesses have different concerns and priorities – so we run these different groups to stay relevant to them” says Holland.

“And there’s no point having meetings for the sake of it: you’ll soon lose the engagement of the very people they are set up to serve.” So, apart from the Retail Security Watch (made up of security officers throughout the BID area) which meets each month, the other Watch Groups are convened only as and when pressing issues need to be addressed.

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The professional security staff around the city are directly and regularly involved in helping to manage low-level crime and ASB as part of their day-to-day jobs, so a regular monthly get-together is essential. "It's where we give, and get, local intelligence about who's who, and where we can share information so officers can recognise new faces, new threats.

"Here our Disc system plays a vital role enabling us to consolidate that information in one place, and to share information securely, conveniently and fast."

A bespoke safety service for the business community

Liverpool BID Company has invested in supporting its levy payers by funding two full-time police officers to focus exclusively on supporting businesses in the city centre and their specific issues and circumstance.

Constables Dave Crawford and Ian Gallagher are both contracted to the BID on a permanent basis from Merseyside Police. By concentrating exclusively on policing the business centre, they have built up invaluable local knowledge and developed priceless personal relationships with levy payers.

The two of them also deliver a degree of continuity which is sometimes lacking in policing where too often a police officer achieves hard-earned rapport with the members of the local community only to be moved-on to another job in another part of the force.

Dave has been working his 'beat' for four years; Ian for the last two. And for both, Disc is an important tool.

Says Ian Gallagher: "Disc helps us gather information – via incident and intelligence reporting – which we need not only to share with levy payers but also with our partners such as the council and of course with the police themselves. Everyone's struggling with resources, so we can help them focus their efforts by targeting prolific or professional offenders".

Disc also provides levy payers with essential information to help them recognise offenders. "We've had some great results through businesses being able to positively identify criminals in Disc" says Dave Crawford. "The instant messaging system means you can put an alert out to



Constables Ian Gallagher (left) and Dave Crawford: creating a valuable and personal relationship with the business community.

every member – great for getting BID levy payers involved and keeping them engaged. From a policing point of view Disc is invaluable.”

Unlike many other town- and city-centre BIDs, the Liverpool BID Company does not operate a banning or exclusion scheme. “Our experience is that larger retailers already have their own schemes,” says Shaun Holland, “and they’re not always comfortable about sharing personal data outside their own businesses.”

Instead, Shaun and his team, working with police and other agencies, focus on securing Criminal Behaviour Orders (CBOs) to keep prolific offenders away from levy payers’ premises.

Respecting a local tradition of generosity

“Also, we certainly share the same public realm issues such as street drinking and rough sleeping as other BIDs, and levy payers look to us to do something about these problems. Liverpool has these kinds of issues in abundance. But we also have a tradition, a culture, of providing support for vulnerable people. It comes out clearest when you see the generosity shown towards beggars and rough sleepers by the people who live and work around here. We have to respect that – and our approach to the problem reflects that.”

“A good example” says Ian Gallagher, “is tents. It’s a big issue in the city centre and one which needs a lot of sensitivity. We take our time with those who are camping out. We take a kind of ‘touchy-feely’ approach which depends very much on the individuals involved. We get to know them so we can help them move on, via the local charity the Whitechapel Centre for example, even if many move straight back! We get to know these people, and learn their histories. I don’t think that conventional neighbourhood policing has the time, or the continuity, that we have.”

The Whitechapel Centre is the council-funded ‘one-stop shop’ offering a wide range of accommodation, resettlement and harm reduction services to the homeless, rough sleepers and street drinkers, and Shaun and his team work closely with it.

Other BID-lead initiatives include the ‘Change Campaign’ encouraging people to donate to a central fund rather than to individuals, so that money can be directed to organisations which help and support homeless people. Shaun also regularly attends and speaks at ‘Lunch & Learn’ sessions held in the city’s larger offices and workplaces.

“It’s an important way to get over the message that giving money to beggars is rarely the best way of helping them.”

In all these initiatives, as well as in communicating with levy payers, Disc plays an essential part.

Disc: getting the right information to the right people at the right time

“If we’re going to work effectively for our levy payers, represent them and their concerns to agencies and police, or help them direct their resources to the right people in the right places at the right times, we must have information” says Shaun.

“Disc gives us that information, whether its reports of low-level crime or anti-social behaviour, or about persistent street drinking, begging or rough sleeping. And it enables us to share it with our levy payers, again, at the right time and in the right places.”

“With that information, we can support our levy payers’ voices with hard facts: essential if we’re to help the police, council or ‘third sector’ agencies like the Whitechapel Centre, or Housing First, to focus on those who need support most.

“And when we have successes – whether new CBOs or good-news stories about arrested shop-lifters or prolific offenders – Disc helps us communicate that to the levy payers who have helped by engaging with us.”