



EXPERIENCE GUILDFORD BID

How Guildford's BID has driven down low-level business crime – and can prove it

As Guildford's Business Improvement District – 'Experience Guildford' – approaches the end of its second five-year term, Pete Lambert, the Town Safety & Venue Liaison Manager, is confident of re-election, thanks among other things, to the strength of its Business Crime Reduction Partnership.

"We've had the BCRP for information-sharing for the best part of 10 years, and we've been using the Disc system for much of that time, providing a secure platform to share information on shoplifting and antisocial behaviour.

"But it wasn't until I took over in 2020 that we actively started pushing our exclusion scheme: collectively barring individuals from member premises. Until then we weren't getting a huge amount of engagement from our levy-payers. That was largely because few incidents were being investigated by police, especially if they were one-off incidents or if there was no known offender. Naturally, this left retailers wondering if there was any point in reporting low-level crime at all.

The new Exclusion Scheme changed everything

"That changed when the exclusion scheme was introduced. It kicked a lot of BCRP members into life, especially when they saw the impact their incident reports, submitted through Disc, were having in helping drive down low-level crime."

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Partnership-working at Experience Guildford is now at an all-time high. While police remain stretched to the limit and continue to prioritise their calls, local businesses are now stepping up and gathering data so that action can be taken, including working with local police to enforce exclusions.

When reported for a first time in Disc, offenders are given a warning letter; if they ignore the warning and a further report is received, they're excluded. Says Pete: "The warning letters have been really successful in stopping a lot of first-timers reoffending. For kids who were just setting off on the wrong path, a straightforward warning can be life-changing – they think, 'If I get excluded I can't go to the cinema or meet my mates at McDonalds or set foot in the Friary Shopping Centre...' and it stops them in their tracks.

Disc "kicked a lot of BCRP members into life, especially when they saw the impact their incident reports were having in helping drive down low"

Pete Lambert



"At my last count we've handed out 150 warning letters in the last two years and we've found that 89% - virtually nine-out-of-ten - have not subsequently re-offended. I think that's great for Guildford, and proves just how effective exclusion schemes can be."

In addition to enabling local business to report incidents, encouraging them to communicate with each other through Disc has been essential in maximising their involvement. Pete is convinced it's the engagement with Disc that makes it so successful: the BCRP now has 236 members logging in regularly.

"We're constantly striving to make sure that people are reporting in, so we have an exact record of everything that's going on. Say for example there's a guy who's committed five different offences, we can match him up to each offence and push Surrey police to build a case against him, or helping to apply for a Criminal Behaviour Order to ban him from even coming into the town."

Two schemes; two Disc systems

Pete runs two Disc systems, one supporting Experience Guildford's Business Crime Reduction Partnership for retailers, and the other supporting West Surrey Pubwatch for the night-time economy including pubs and clubs. Pete says Disc is invaluable for sharing information between the two.

"For instance, I hold the banning list for the pubs – people do silly things when they're drunk but might not be a threat to day-time businesses. However, if we think it's appropriate, we might put them on the retail list too as a 'Person of Interest', and if the incident is serious enough, we can exclude them from the town in the daytime as well.

"We've had a couple of occasions when people have drawn knives. Pubwatch will get together and decide if it's serious enough to ban them from the pubs for life. We'll present this to the BCRP to decide if the ban should also include shops and retail units. We've found that people who have been excluded for the use of a weapon have not been reported again."

Experience Guildford's daytime system covers just the town centre, but the Pubwatch scheme has now been extended to the neighbouring towns of Godalming, Haslemere and Woking, each sharing information with each other through Disc. As people go from one town to another, staff are now aware of known troublemakers and can see where there are warnings against an individual.

Pete says that licensees in the new areas were all keen to get on board with Disc: "Prior to Disc they were using paper copies for their banned lists, which is a security issue because they can be accidentally left on the bar for example. With Disc you can see the list on your phone in the Disc App where the data is safe and secure.

"If you're a door attendant or a manager you can very quickly thumb through the Disc App and see if someone's banned – but no-one else can see the images. And if there ever is a security breach, all mugshots in Disc are 'watermarked' to show which member has been responsible for sharing them with non-Members.



Experience Guildford uses Disc to manage its own town-centre pubwatch, and pubwatches in surrounding towns

“Working together we’ve helped make the night-time economy a safe and welcoming environment that customers want to visit, and where businesses can prosper. And it’s not just managing exclusions where Disc has helped.

“We were one of the first areas to really clamp down on drink-spiking and we publicised the problem using Disc. Also, Disc was invaluable for promoting our ‘Ask for Angela’ program for vulnerable or threatened people to discreetly ask for help from bar staff.”

Disc’s Alert system: one of the partnership’s biggest successes

Pete points to another invaluable feature of Disc: its Alert system. “A prime example of this was just a couple of weeks ago when we had a group of young people passing off fake £20 notes. One was passed in a coffee shop which accepted it, but within moments the manager had sent out an alert about the scam to about 250 businesses, through Disc.

“Within five minutes JD Sports spotted them trying to pass off the notes and quickly security staff, the BID’s town rangers and the police were on the spot and apprehended them. We took a huge amount of counterfeit money off the street from what appeared to be an organised crime group – all as a direct result of the alert system on Disc”.

Says Pete: “It’s a scary world, so it’s great that by working with Disc we can make a difference, and make people feel safer. I love my town centre, I was born and raised here, and I’ve worked in Guildford all my life. And I’ve got a young daughter and I don’t want her to have to watch her back all the while she’s out. I want to make sure it’s a safe place, not only for my daughter but for other people’s daughters and sons too. The more I can do to make a change, the happier I’ll be!”