

MOPAC Budget Consultation 2025 - 2029

New West End Company Response

New West End Company (NWECC), the Business Improvement District (BID) representing over 600 property and occupier businesses across the West End and Mayfair, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Greater London Authority's Draft Police and Crime Plan 2025 - 2029. We operate across 82 streets, anchored by Oxford Street, Regent Street and Bond Street. Our members include businesses such as Selfridges, Boots, Primark, H&M and John Lewis, which make up one of the largest and busiest retail, leisure and hospitality districts in the UK and Europe.

We are aligned with Mayor's continued focus on making London a safer city for all, underpinned by his commitment to invest record amounts from City Hall during this upcoming Police and Crime Plan period. We also welcome the draft Plan's acknowledgement that this ambition cannot be delivered by the police alone; we know ourselves that partnership working is key to us delivering for our members, and we have existing relationships with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), Greater London Authority (GLA), Westminster City Council, and the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC).

That said, as the Mayor and Deputy Mayor themselves acknowledge, despite the new Government taking important steps to increase funding for the MPS, it remains chronically underfunded, belying the unique responsibilities and pressures of policing London as a global capital city. We feel this particularly keenly in the West End which, despite being globally recognised as a retail, leisure and hospitality destination, and nationally recognised as a driver of economic growth, has grappled with rapidly rising crime rates in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic – in Westminster, theft alone almost tripled in two years, with offences are highly concentrated in just two wards, West End and St James's.¹ Theft has increased faster than any other offence and is higher than the 2017 – 2019 average considered in Westminster City Council's 2020 Cumulative Impact Assessment.²

As the BID representing the West End and Mayfair, we are committed to contributing to a district that is a safe and welcoming environment for all those who work, visit and invest here. Against the backdrop of escalating crime rates, 'security' consistently tops our members' survey as the most important service we offer. As a result, it remains the single biggest investment for us as a business – most evident in our 24/7 Security team, who patrol the area day and night. In 2024, to fill gaps in local police resourcing, we invested in 67,838 hours of, privately funded, high visibility patrols across the West End and Mayfair – the equivalent of 7.7 years.

Our Security team work closely with MPS to ensure that this activity is additive to the work already being undertaken by the police. This includes regular joint operations – including with the Home Office – as well as investment in professional training on issues ranging from counter terrorism to tackling Violence Against Women and Girls. We benefit from a close working relationship with our West End Town Centre Team, launched in September 2024, and have successfully set up a

¹ Cumulative Impact Assessment, Westminster City Council, 2023

² Ibid.

framework for working with Gold Commanders to support with the management of high footfall protests and limit the impact on the business community within the West End

However, despite the high-level political acknowledgement of the West End's economic and social importance (including its designation as an 'International Centre' in the London Plan and, most recently, the announcement of a Mayoral Development Corporation for Oxford Street), and the tireless work undertaken by the MPS and our own Security team on a daily basis, Westminster retains the unfortunate accolade of being the most dangerous Borough in London; it has a crime rate 27% higher than the London average, and 65% of all incidents take place in the West End.³

The impact of this cannot be understated. Our members are on the front line of this crime swell, and face violence, shoplifting, theft-from-person, and anti-social behaviour on a daily basis. In 2024, our Security team responded to 2134 theft related offences. These crimes have a significant economic impact on the businesses against which they are perpetrated as well as on the wellbeing and safety of their employees, who face intimidation and violence from thieves.

They also have a negative impact on the reputation of the UK, both as a tourist destination, and as a destination for investment – issues including watch crime in the Mayfair area have been cited by international business leaders on trade trips, for instance, whilst phone theft continues to make national headlines.⁴

At a time when London and UK are facing challenging economic headwinds, we cannot allow pressures on policing to have a knock-on economic impact on domestic and international visitors, whom our members rely on to remain profitable. International visitor perception, in particular, has become increasingly important in recent years, as domestic spend continues to be impacted by both inflationary pressure and lack of consumer confidence.

Against this backdrop, we have identified four priority areas that we would like to see reflected or strengthened in the Police and Crime Plan 2025 – 2026.

Rebuilding Business Trust

Neighbourhood policing is, rightly, a key focus of the Plan and we congratulate the Mayor on putting 1,300 more neighbourhood police officers on the streets during his last term. We were delighted to speak at the launch of the West End Town Centre Team (TCT) last September and, in a short period of time, have developed a close working partnership.

But the West End TCT faces policing challenges which are unique to a commercial district like the West End and not reflected in the Plan – which instead focuses on the requirements of residential neighbourhood policing. The plan references the need to rebuild public trust in the MPS; but this is true of trust from businesses too. The Mayor references the '*need to work collaboratively with businesses and crime prevention organisation, such as [...] BIDs, to*

³ Cumulative Impact Assessment, Westminster City Council, 2023

⁴ '*India's business elite sounds alarm over Rolex thefts in London's Mayfair*', Financial Times, 6 February 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/3467184a-23dc-427c-a1e8-0256b5f0f653>

improve the reporting of retail crimes' but we hear frequently from our own members that, even when reported, MPS is too slow to respond, or fails to follow-up meaningfully. This has created a significant trust gap, which is only widening the gulf between the number of incidents occurring and those being reported.

Failure to tackle this trust gap is at odds with other Mayoral strategies which are focused on driving growth and delivering a world-leading visitor experience in the capital, including the London Good Growth Plan and the recent announcement of a Mayoral Development Corporation for Oxford Street – a notable acknowledgement of the West End's economic and social significance to the capital and the country.

Alongside the Heart of London Business Alliance, we are advocating for the creation of a new West End Crime Reduction Taskforce, which would bring both West End BIDs to work more closely with central Government, the GLA, the MPS, Transport for London (TfL) and Westminster City Council. Its purpose would be to coordinate efforts to reduce crime and enhance safety in the West End.

We are also calling for a dedicated 'Operation Hospitality' plan which factors in the significant economic contribution of hospitality venues across the capital, and the role they play as, often, one of the first touch points for visitors to our capital, and their economic contribution to local and national economy. Today, 60% of visitors typically include leisure & hospitality activities as part of their visit to the West End and hotel room provision in the district saw 4% year-on-year growth in 2024.

Addressing 'high volume' crime

The Mayor rightly identifies that we “have seen concerning increases in neighbourhood crime types, particularly robbery and theft” and there is early reference in the Plan to the link between the cost-of-living crisis and increases in violence, robberies, burglary and theft during 2023.

Despite this, the need to tackle organised acquisitive crime, including theft-from-person, is not meaningfully addressed in the body of the Plan itself, beyond reference to operations or initiatives which are already in play – particularly those related to either violent crime, or retail crime specifically. It has been acknowledged, including by the Home Secretary, Yvette Cooper, that there has been a 'shameful neglect' of shoplifting which has left people feeling 'unsafe' and allowed the practice to become an 'epidemic'.⁵ We would argue that although lower 'harm' on a per incident basis, to credibly tackle this epidemic requires the same strategic focus and KPI setting taken with VAWG and violent crime.

This is particularly true when it is being perpetrated by organised groups. One such organised crime group, operating in the West End, has stolen £33,000 worth of goods from single store

⁵ 'Labour: 'Shameful neglect' of shoplifting must end', The Times, 26 August, 2024, <http://thetimes.com/uk/crime/article/well-end-shameful-neglect-of-shoplifting-by-police-vows-labour-d7wwwjwj>

since September 2024 – one of multiple stores consistently targeted by the group over a period of years. Despite awareness of this group on a local level, lenient sentencing means that they continue to operate today.

As a result, in addition to existing initiatives, such as the London Retail Harm Reduction Partnership and public health approach to tackling the causes of organised crime, particularly the exploitation of children, and new Appropriate Adult Service for Vulnerable Adults in London, we strongly advocate for a reduction in high volume crimes, particularly in global centres like the West End, to be included as a key metric for success for the MPS going forward.

Policing an International City

The MPS continues to face a prolonged period of sustained pressure, characterised by a large increase in the number of marches, protests and national events taking place in the capital – many of which have gone through, and disrupting, visitation and trading in the West End. We have worked closely with MPS’ Gold Commanders in the last few months to mitigate the impact of these protests on the West End and have appreciated thoughtful responses to the impact assessments we have submitted on behalf of our members, including MPS’ decision, on a number of occasions, to re-route marches during particularly high-footfall and/or significant trading periods in the district.

The reality is, however, that MPS simply cannot sustain this level of activity without greater funding. Too often, the pressures of policing an international city leads to necessary, but challenging, abstractions of neighbourhood policing teams, including the West End TCT. These teams must be more robustly ringfenced – precisely because neighbourhood policing is as important as the Mayor has identified.

We reiterate the need, made clear in our previous consultation responses, for a review of the National and International Capital Cities grant, to ensure that the MPS has adequate funding to deal with the complexities of policing London, whilst maintaining levels of servicing in day-to-day policing.

Tackling Organised Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

The Draft Plan rightly identifies the need to tackle organised crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB), citing the fact that, in the Public Attitude Survey, nearly a quarter of Londoners (23%) identified ASB as in their top three priorities for policing and safety. As part of his plan to tackle both organised crime and anti-social behaviour, the Mayor is right to point out that the drivers of crime are complex and organised crime related to the illegal drugs trade, in particular, requires a public health approach. We are also supportive of his commitment to safeguarding individuals who are exploited by organised crime gangs.

This is not, however, reflective of the significant organised crime activity that we see here in the West End, characterised by coordinated nuisance begging, anti-social behaviour and with links to organised international crime gangs. We have worked closely with strategic partners, including

the MPS and Home Office, to conduct multi-agency operations to tackle these gangs, and the partnership working and intelligence sharing framework developed proved successful.

We are calling on the Mayor to include reference to this type of organised crime and to support a plan to tackle it on a more consistent basis, in partnership with other stakeholders and Government agencies.

CCTV

We welcome MOPAC's proposals to extend collaboration between the GLA, TfL, British Transport Police, local authorities, landowners, businesses and residents to leverage technology such as CCTV to enhance the general safety of the West End.

Nonetheless, there remains little detail about how this will be implemented in high traffic, commercial districts like the West End – indeed, CCTV is referenced in just one paragraph. At a time when crime has never been more visible, it is important that we leverage all technologies and tools at our disposal to combat it. CCTV, deployed strategically across London and particularly in high footfall areas such as the West End, would go a long way to overcoming evidence threshold barriers to conviction, which so often puts prolific and known offenders back on the streets.

We thank MOPAC for its consideration of the priority areas outlined above. We share the Mayor of London, Sir Sadiq Khan, and Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime's, Kaya Comer-Schwartz's belief that London is one of the most vibrant and diverse places on earth, acting as a global centre for business, culture and sport – of which the West End is a significant, and unique part. By taking the measures we have outlined above, we believe that the West End – and, by extension, London – can better safeguard this reputation, and secure its position as a globally renowned retail, leisure, hospitality and cultural destination.

Warmest regards,

Dee Corsi

Chief Executive, New West End Company

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