

City of London Corporation Committee Report

Committee(s): Local Policing Committee – for information	Dated: 10.11.2025
Subject: Signage for crime prevention in the City of London	Public report: For information
This proposal: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• delivers Corporate Plan 2024-29 outcomes	Vibrant Thriving Destination
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
Report of:	Town Clerk Commissioner of the City Police
Report author:	Charles Smart Lorenzo Conigliaro

Summary

Members asked the City Police and Corporation to scope options for wider use of crime prevention signage, including on the City's boundaries to differentiate it as an independent policing area.

Evidence on the impact of signage is limited and not definitive but indicates highly-targeted signs (i.e. for specific offences in specific contexts) can be effective, while more 'general' anti-crime signage likely has limited impact and can in some cases increase public worries over safety.

Given this - and considerations of cost and practical and legal feasibility - viable options might be: new signage on City Police boxes, targeted signage in crime hotspots, better co-ordination of 'private' crime and safety signage, and (noting this work is at an early stage) signs linked to a City-wide Public Space Protection Order.

None of these yet have identified funding so this report seeks comments on the options to inform further work, rather than final decisions on which to implement.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- **Note** the report
- **Comment** on potential options at paragraph 9

Main Report

Background

Origin of this report

1. Members commissioned the City Police and Police Authority team to look at options to increase the use of signs in the City for crime-and-safety purposes, and specifically the idea of signs on the City's boundaries to highlight that it is an independent, distinct policing area.

Evidence for signage as a crime prevention tool

2. "Signage" encompasses in practice a diverse range of initiatives and, as such, there isn't a definitive evidence base on it as a standalone intervention. The College of Policing's *Crime prevention toolkit* – the UK's main repository of available research on what works to reduce crime – only assesses "signage" as a component of other interventions.
3. Broadly, available research indicates signage can be used effectively in two ways:
 - a) To target a very specific crime issue in a specific context – for example, a widely-cited evaluation¹ found that signs saying "cycle thieves, we are watching you" placed on bike racks was, on its own, an effective deterrent of bike theft (*though see footnote*)
 - b) To supplement and amplify other interventions, again in quite specific contexts – for example, to indicate that a building is covered by CCTV or that items in a shop are security-marked²
4. The closest analogue to evaluating the more general-purpose "this is a secure / intensively-policed area" signage suggested by Members is a study from the Netherlands, which used a virtual reality simulation to test whether burglars (vs general members of the public) responded differently to signs indicating neighbourhood watch and/or police surveillance in the area³. It found "only small effects" in deterring burglars.
5. Further, some evidence⁴ suggests that signage such as Neighbourhood Watch / "Criminals Beware" posters can *increase* public worries about victimisation and fear of crime amongst some – on the basis that if a person is already predisposed to be worried about crime a poster reminding them of crime will trigger more, not less, worry.

¹ [Link](#) – note that the report found that theft was almost wholly displaced to bike racks where signs were not put up

² Such signage is partially evaluated in studies on [situational crime prevention](#) and [Secure by Design \(SBD\) standards](#), with – for property marking – the College of Policing noting "moderately strong" evidence albeit with caveats about the rigour of underlying studies

³ [Link](#)

⁴ [Link](#)

6. As such, while not comprehensive, available evidence suggests a greater impact from specific signage targeting specific issues as opposed to general signage targeting general criminality (which may also, for some groups, have the opposite effect to that intended).

Current Position

7. There are broadly three categories of crime-and-safety-related signage currently in use in the City:
 - A) *Fixed police-related signage at City borders* – there are signs on the City’s main roads indicating the ‘Ring of Steel’ camera and numberplate recognition system, stating “if you can see this, we can see you”.
 - B) *Permanent ‘other’ signage within the City* – there is a huge range of crime-and-safety related signage on and within private premises in the City, from CCTV camera signage to ‘Ask for Angela’ and ‘Safe Havens’ posters in licensed premises to messages about bike-locking on cycle racks. However, the City Police generally doesn’t use such permanent signage nor do they routinely co-ordinate its use by private businesses or premises (which would be a very large administrative undertaking – though see *Options* below).
 - C) *Temporary City-Police-or-Corporation-created signage within the City* – the City Police uses A-frames and mobile digi-boards for visible Servator patrol deployments, the monthly Operation Reframe initiative, and for targeted campaigns such as recently around romance fraud. Similar to this, the Corporation occasionally deploys specific campaigns or contextual messaging on the City’s fixed electronic advertising signs at e.g. bus stops. Recently, the City Police has also delivered its ‘Blue Plaque’ temporary signage campaign on City streets as part of action on phone snatching.

Options

8. There are several aspects to consider around greater use of crime-and-safety-related signage by the City Police and/or Corporation:
 - A) *Aims* – Per the evidence review above, effective signage is typically deployed in a very specific context and against a specific crime type. Temporary signage is already used in this way by City Police. Permanent, more general-purpose signage at the City’s borders is unlikely to have a material impact on crime but could (if phrased/framed correctly) improve public feelings of safety and/or highlight that the City is an independent policing area.
 - B) *Feasibility (legal)* – Permanent safety signage in public spaces generally falls under advertisement regulations and so requires the local planning authority’s permission (here, the Corporation). It is typically straightforward to get permission for static and unilluminated safety-related signage but illuminated and/or digital signs would be significantly trickier, as these engage issues of public safety (including roads safety, as they may distract drivers) and amenity (including visual impacts, as they are more prominent).

- C) *Feasibility (practical)* – Signage “at the City’s boundaries” could be interpreted in several ways, from major highways down to all ways in and out of the City including at train and tube stations (where signage is controlled by TfL). The need to avoid adding to street clutter also puts the focus on using existing street furniture, which limits wider-ranging options.
- D) *Cost and value for money* – Costs and value-for-money will vary widely among prospective initiatives: poster-type signs targeting specific issues are cheap and, potentially, quite high-impact. Larger, digital, more general-purpose signage is increasingly expensive and may be less effective for crime reduction (though, as above, they may achieve other aims). It is important, more widely, to consider if additional signage is likely to represent the best-value investment compared to other crime reduction measures of similar cost. And, it should be noted there is currently no identified Corporation or City Police budget for additional safety signage, and City Police note they would struggle to administratively maintain an expanded set of permanent signage.
- E) *Unintended consequences* – Per the evidence review footnote, signage can displace crime to un-signed areas and increase fear of crime among certain groups (i.e. those already predisposed to this). There is also evidence that, as safety-related signs “age” (i.e. become dirty, ripped, outdated), they can make people feel less rather than more safe.

9. Given these, the City Police and Corporation consider the following to be the most viable options to explore further:

- *Use of City Police boxes at City boundaries* – these are prominent and well-sited on major roads, are currently unused and, in cases, in need of cosmetic repair anyway. Static and un-illuminated signage on these is likely – subject to further scoping – to be affordable. Digital options would be more expensive, more complicated to gain approval for, and pose safety risks as they are in the middle of busy roads. Wider coverage – at all or most entrances and exits to the City – would likewise be more expensive without a clear evidence base that they would reduce crime.
- *Targeted signage in crime hotspots* – the analysis and technical improvements associated with delivering Hotspot Response Fund initiatives in the City since 2024/25 has significantly improved identification of crime hotspots in the City (by crime type, location, time of day, time of week, season). This presents an opportunity to explore the use of highly-targeted signage in the areas of highest crime and is in line with the wider problem-solving approach to crime being embedded by City Police.
- *More consistency and co-ordination of certain signage in private spaces* – the wide range of crime-and-safety-related signage used in private premises (pubs, bars etc.) would benefit from greater consistency. While it is not feasible for the City Police or Corporation to do this wholesale, plans to establish a City-wide Business Crime Reduction Partnership offers an opportunity to do so to some degree.

- *Signage linked to a City-wide Public Space Protection Order* – the Corporation’s community safety team is at the very early stages of scoping enactment of a City-wide PSPO, which is a way to prohibit certain anti-social activities in a given area. If enacted, there is a legal requirement to erect signs in or near the area subject to the PSPO which in this case would be at the City’s limits. It should be noted this would be different to the idea proposed by Members – i.e. it would be specifically about the PSPO and what it prohibits, rather than a more general message about the City as a distinct policing area.

Members are invited to comment on these potential options and suggest any others for consideration.

Proposals

10. At this stage, there are no confirmed plans to deliver the options indicated above – all require further scoping and identification of funding sources (if any). As such, this report proposes to continue that scoping, with any additions suggested by Members.

Corporate & Strategic Implications – *as detailed in ‘Options’ section above*

Conclusion

11. Based on available evidence and considerations including cost and feasibility, the City Police and Corporation jointly conclude that there are viable options to explore further on increased use of crime-and-safety signage in the Square Mile. While extensive ‘general purpose’ anti-crime signage along the City’s borders is not an option the City Police and Corporation propose to scope further, some of the options are in a similar vein – both ‘City Police box’ and ‘PSPO’ options would entail more or different signage on the City’s borders.
12. The options set out above will be scoped further, incorporating Member comments provided here. It should again be noted that the main barrier will be funding – neither the Corporation nor City Police has, at this stage, identified budget for more signage.

Appendices – None

Background Papers – None

Charles Smart – Charles.smart@cityoflondon.gov.uk
Police Authority team, City of London Corporation

Superintendent Lorenzo Conigliaro – Lorenzo.conigliaro@cityoflondon.police.uk
Head of First Contact, Response, Neighbourhoods, Partnership & Prevention and Licensing, City of London Police

