

# Summary

In the Netherlands, nuisance and minor offences are enforced by municipal officers with limited investigative powers the so called Special Investigative Officers (SIO's). On the initiative of the Minister of Security and Justice, an experiment was organized to test whether these municipal SIO's could be used to assist police in dealing with shoplifters arrested in the act by private guards or store personnel. These officers are called 'winkelboa' in Dutch. They are only allowed to replace police officers in specific types of cases, i.e., non-violent cases involving a first-time, adult offender acting alone and where the value of any property stolen does not exceed 120 Euro. The objective of the experiment was to see whether the use of municipal officers could improve retailers' satisfaction with the reporting process – and thereby increase their willingness to report shoplifting incidents – without increasing the workload of the police.

Six municipalities were recruited to participate in the experiment: Zaltbommel, Rotterdam, Haarlemmermeer, 's-Hertogenbosch, Vlaardingen and Roermond. A national advisory group was set up with representatives from the six pilot municipalities and other stakeholders (i.e., police, public prosecutors, the Association of Municipalities and the Association of Retailers). During this same period the Ministry published a memorandum in which the parameters of the pilot were outlined. It was decided to divide the project into two phases: a planning and an implementation phase. This would allow the pilot municipalities an opportunity to reconsider their participation after the first (planning) phase of the project. The authorities in the municipalities of Roermond and Vlaardingen decided to continue the pilot to the next phase, while the other four municipalities decided to resign after Phase 1.

Results of an external evaluation of the pilot project are outlined in this report. The evaluation consists of three parts:

1. A planning evaluation describes the groundwork and planning engaged in by the six municipalities prior to the experiment. This evaluation is based on interviews with key respondents and an examination of various written documents including the action plans drawn up by the municipalities involved.
2. A process evaluation in the two experimental municipalities (Roermond and Vlaardingen) based on interviews with retailers, police officers and municipal officers.
3. An impact evaluation based on deployment records and reported rates of shoplifting in the experimental (Roermond and Vlaardingen) and control municipalities.

## Planning evaluation

Each municipality involved in the experiment was expected to draw up an action plan to be agreed upon by police, public prosecutors and retailers. It was hoped that these plans would also contain the preconditions for a solid implementation of the experiment upon which the mayor, chief of police and public prosecutor could make final decisions regarding the operational deployment of municipal officers. The planning evaluation examines three aspects of the planning process: How the project plans took shape; the content of the original plans;

and which divisive arguments had to be resolved before the municipalities could move on to the second phase of the project.

### ***How the project plans took shape***

The municipal representatives were in contact with the police and public prosecutors, though it were the police representatives who acted as the main intermediaries. In all municipalities other than Zaltbommel, representatives from the Association of Retailers were asked about their opinions on the idea of letting municipal SIO's deal with shoplifters. The formal decision on whether to engage in the experiment was taken by the local 'triangle' (mayor, chief of police and public prosecutor). In five municipalities, the local triangle approved the decisions taken by the municipal representatives. Only the local triangle of 's-Hertogenbosch voted against supporting the proposal of their civil servants.

### ***Content of the project plans***

The project plans of the four municipalities that decided not to participate focused on practical difficulties that were likely to arise and even went so far as to question the potential benefits of the experiment overall.

The plan of Vlaardingen was brief and only provided rough guidelines for deployment. According to the plan, the primary functions of municipal SIO's would be to increase patrols during high crime hours and assist shopkeepers who make calls for service. Under this plan, they would take possession of suspects caught in the act from shop personnel and hold them until police arrived. Given this scenario, the municipal SIO has no need for additional powers or training. The only administrative task of the municipal SIO in regard to shoplifting would be the writing of an incident report concerning their part in the arrest.

Roermond is the only municipality that outlined a full-scale plan, i.e., a detailed description of how the entire process would be organized and what activities and services were expected from the 'winkelboa'. Agents of the police service center would have to use shop personnel's descriptions in the initial calls for service to decide whether municipal SIO's were eligible to handle a shoplifting case on their own (i.e., whether the case qualified as involving a non-violent, first-time, adult offender acting alone with stolen property worth less than 120 Euro).

Roermond's detailed project plan also anticipated potential problems. One of the foreseen problems concerned municipal SIO's lack of access to police data systems. The proposed solution was to provide municipal SIO's with a laptop at the police station. The necessary paper work could be entered on this laptop and then later transferred to police computer systems by an administrative agents of the police. Roermond's project plan made clear that the police and public prosecutors were confident in the ability of municipal SIO's to handle arrested shoplifters successfully. Roermond police were thus willing to transfer some of their practical tasks to municipal SIO's while police in the other pilot municipalities remained reluctant to do so.

### ***Arguments against the 'winkelboa'***

There were several objections raised by the municipalities that ultimately decided not to proceed with the operational deployment of municipal SIO's. These objections had broad support in the sense that they were shared by several parties. The absence of financial compensation to municipal SIO's for additional work was seen as a serious disadvantage – since attention to shoplifting cases would, by definition, take time away from other enforcement tasks.

Apart from this financial concern, there was also a question as to how much relief municipal SIO's would actually give police. This is because municipal SIO's can only be used for simple shoplifting – which means that the police need to come to the crime scene anyway in all other types of cases. Equally important was the question of how one can determine in advance whether a case concerns only simple shoplifting. Can an agent of the police service center be expected to make this determination on the basis of information derived from the initial call for service and then decide whether police attendance is required?

There was also some doubt about the speed with which municipal SIO's could reach crime scenes and take custody of suspects – which directly affects the willingness of retailers to report shoplifting to the authorities. In addition, there were questions about how an arrested shoplifter should be transferred to police custody. Not all municipal SIO's do have vehicles equipped for the secure transportation of detainees. This leaves two choices: Either the municipality would have to invest in new vehicles or police would have to attend all crime scenes in order to transport shoplifters to police stations. The latter solution clearly counteracts the whole rationale for deploying municipal SIO's in the first place: the lightening of police workloads.

### **Process and impact evaluations**

The second phase of the pilot project revolved around the actual deployment of municipal SIO's. As mentioned, there were only two municipalities that wound up deploying municipal SIO's - and in one of them (Vlaardingen) deployment was minimal. Thus, it was really only the municipality of Roermond that achieved practical experience with municipal SIO's and examined their patterns of deployment and the results achieved.

Retailers were generally rather positive about the use of municipal SIO's, though they didn't have a lot of experience with these officers in practice. Nonetheless, the idea that extra enforcement was available sounded good to them. A minority of the retailers had a negative image of municipal SIO's in general and thus also of the 'winkelboa'. We measure little difference in attitude among retailers in Roermond and Vlaardingen. In Roermond, the police actively participated in the pilot and tried to build workable routines. In practice, however, this appears to have been complicated by the municipal SIO's lack of access to the police computer system. Given this, the use of municipal SIO's did little to nothing to lessen police workloads. In fact, it sometimes increased them. Furthermore, the municipal SIO's were deployed on only a limited number of occasions, which meant they gained little practical experience with shoplifting tasks in the field. At the end of the five-month experiment, both

parties (police and municipalities) concluded that the use of municipal SIO's assigned to extra tasks in the field dealing with simple shoplifting had no future.

During the pilot period (9 October 2012 to 28 February 2013) there were 124 registered shoplifting cases in Roermond. Of these 124 cases, 60 were simple shopliftings committed by an adult suspect. Fourteen of these cases were attended to by municipal SIO's. Of these fourteen, seven were handled by the municipal SIO's and seven were handed over to police. The seven cases handled by municipal SIO's all resulted in fines.

It took municipal SIO's in Roermond an average of 16 minutes to reach crime scenes. The fastest response time was 9 minutes, while the longest was 30 minutes. In eleven of the fourteen cases handled by municipal SIO's, the municipal officer arrived at the scene within 20 minutes. On average, police arrived at comparable crime scenes at the same speed, i.e., 20 minutes. Based on the limited number of municipal officer cases, response times for municipal SIO's do not appear any shorter than those of police. They are, however, more stable: In no case did a shopkeeper have to wait more than an hour before a municipal officer arrived to collect a suspect.

Suspects were calm in all fourteen shoplifting cases attended to by municipal SIO's. The municipal SIO's were therefore not confronted with any form of violence. The fourteen suspects comprised ten men and four women, nine of which were Dutch nationals. The suspects' average age was 33. Five of the seven suspects taken over by police had previous police contacts.

An analysis of the remaining 46 reports (60 simple shoplifting minus the 14 cases where the municipal officer was sent) shows that an additional seven of these cases met the criteria for deployment of a municipal officer. In total then, the figures indicate that a municipal officer would have been eligible for deployment under the specified framework in approximately one out of every six shoplifting cases, i.e., 21 out of 124 cases. During the experimental period, fewer shoplifting cases were registered in Roermond than during the same period the previous two years. The figures in two control municipalities and the monthly shoplifting figures in Roermond suggest that this decline was not due to the pilot, but to random fluctuations.

In Vlaardingen, 65 shoplifting cases were reported during the pilot period 1 November 2012 to 28 February 2013. The pilot area – City Centre – accounted for 39 of these reports, 23 of which occurred during high crime times of the day. During these hours, municipal officer patrols were increased and retailers knew they could call on these patrols to take over suspects. Retailers, however, did not take any advantage of these opportunities. During the experimental period, approximately the same number of shopliftings was reported in the City Centre as reported in the same period during the previous two years. Figures from the rest of Vlaardingen and another control area do not indicate that the pilot project in the City Centre had any effect on the level of reported shoplifting.

### **Did the experiment meet its objectives?**

During Phase 1, four of the six municipalities decided that it would be difficult to meet the objectives of the experiment and therefore dropped out of the project. The municipalities of Vlaardingen and Roermond decided to test the deployment in practice. The evaluation reveals that the experiment failed to meet its objectives. Retailer satisfaction with the reporting process did not improve and there was no evidence of an increase in their willingness to report shoplifting incidents. Municipal officers replaced police officers in the handling of shoplifters in only a limited number of cases. This is because the majority of shoplifting cases did not meet the criteria necessary for municipal SIO's to handle them on their own (i.e., simple shoplifting involving a non-violent, first-time, adult offender acting alone with stolen property worth less than 120 Euro). Furthermore, police officer involvement was still required even in those few cases where municipal SIO's were eligible to act alone due to municipal SIO's' lack of access to police computing systems. Given these problems, the experiment failed to result in a reduction of police workloads.