

**DATE: August 2020**

**Hello! And welcome to Issue 4. Addressing shop staff safety under government COVID19 restrictions**

#### **Meeting with retailers to look at security measures and policies to prevent theft**

This month we have been building relationships with retailers and looking at offences committed on their premises and their crime prevention measures.

Unfortunately, Boots, Tesco and Nike within the south of the county have had huge losses down to organised crime. Groups of individuals entering the premises and targeting high value items such as alcohol and branded clothing and trainers. The groups use various techniques to avoid being stopped; hiding when removing security tags or worse using threats and intimidation towards staff.

There are a number of suggestions we can make to retailers to help prevent theft in the store. Such ideas include placing a member of staff on the door on a rota system, to act as a 'Welcome Officer' - Disney use this technique to great effect. The member of staff says hello to people as they walk in, which is not only great customer service but also acts as a visual deterrent and puts that element of doubt into a criminals' mind. Other suggestions may include updating old CCTV systems and then advertising the fact on posters around the store and placing security people in the store. The oldest tricks are the best, so security personal walk around the store and stand by the entrance as a deterrent. Store reorganisation also helps; placing tills and customer service desks by the entrance, placing all high value stock to the rear of the store or next to a staff room entrance.

We will add Thurrock industrial areas to local patrol plans to be a visual deterrent and operate in plain clothes around these sites. Due to the location of these offences we will be liaising with our colleagues in the Metropolitan Police service to see if we can bring these offenders to justice.

*If you work in the retail sector and would like some crime prevention ideas, please do contact us, we would be happy to work with you*

Business.crime.unit@essex.police.uk

#### **Stop Violence towards Retail Staff**

It is astonishing to discover that violence towards shop staff has increased nationally during the pandemic restrictions. Harassment of staff, bullying tactics and physical violence including spitting have all been reported in Essex. This is extremely disconcerting as shop staff play an important role in our communities and indeed without them we would not be able to obtain basic items we need during this pandemic.

We are looking at a police initiative to reduce offences towards retail staff and identify offenders. We are approaching both national and independent retailers with this campaign, designing posters and other visual deterrents to be displayed in shops. We are looking at communication and conflict resolution training for staff and supporting victims by ensuring best practice with investigations.

The Home Secretary Priti Patel has highlighted this as a national issue and invited retailers to contribute by calling for evidence before looking at ways of working on the issue. We want to be one step ahead in Essex by offering support in this area.

#### **Use of information sharing systems**

When supporting businesses we are implementing a number of information sharing systems in identified town centres within the county. These systems allow police to input information and police briefings, but also allow members of BAC (Business Against Crime groups) to access and more importantly input information to assist in crime prevention and detection. This system will also assist in lowering violence against retail workers as stills and CCTV footage can be uploaded and distributed so other members can remain vigilant.

Please get in touch if you would like to know more about joining a group and the information sharing system in use.

### **Wearing Masks**

It is now advised to wear masks in all shops in England.

This step has been taken to slow contamination and to make people feel safer when shopping.

It has been brought to our attention that retailers are feeling uneasy about criminals now wearing facial coverings and these coverings are hiding their identity. I would say to them that teams within Essex Police are extremely good at knowing their local criminals! People can be identified by the usual branded clothing they wear, scars or tattoos and other distinguishing features. Hair style and colour. Also by the company they keep.

An incident recently saw a male enter a shop and conceal a bottle of alcohol in his jacket, leaving without making any attempt to pay. As soon as he exited the store he removed his face mask and was picked up on the cameras outside! Thus he was paid a visit!

### **Please adhere to social distancing recommendations**

The government and police nationally are aware that social distancing advice is not being adhered to in some shops, pubs and restaurants. Ultimately business will continue to suffer if local lockdown restrictions are introduced in Essex.

### **Guidance packs**

The business crime unit have recognised that there needs to be more transparency between business victims of crime and the police service with regards to investigation and prosecution processes.

The unit have developed Guidance information for businesses that include information on policing processes so that businesses understand what happens between giving a statement and the end of the investigation.

This guidance will form part of a self-reporting pack that victims can use to report incidents. The pack will also include an 'Impact Statement' that gives business victims an opportunity to explain to court the impact the incident has had on them personally and any negative impact it has had on their business or income. Some incidents are so serious that people have had to close their businesses or force costly changes. We feel this should be considered within a prosecution and taken into consideration in court.

We are aware that victims often feel 'police do nothing' so if we are able to explain processes and what actually happens, it will lead to better relationships.

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## **What have the Business Crime Unit been doing to support business?**

[Keyholder Database](#)

[COVID19 Business Crime Prevention Guides](#)

[Responding to emerging crime trends](#)

[Progressing Business against Crime groups across  
Essex and implementing information sharing  
system](#)

[Take positive action against offenders and look for innovative  
ways to stop offending](#)

## Gift Card Fraud

The Business Crime Unit are working collaboratively with our colleagues from The Fraud Team in a joint project to protect vulnerable people from being targeted by offenders and the Gift Card Scam.

Victims are located by offenders who have access to a 'suckers' list of people who have already been victims of scams. People who are likely to pick up the phone and engage with scammers and who are likely to confide in a stranger online or over the phone. Offenders will contact them and pretend to be a government agency, for example HMRC and explain that they owe TAX from years ago. The scammers then say that the only way to pay the fee is by using Gift Cards. So the victim purchases cards from major stores and is then requested to send the card numbers to the scammers.

We are working closely with Major Supermarket chains by putting prevent measures in place. Adding prompts on electronic tills so cashiers will ask security and welfare questions to customers and there will be a new procedure in place for reporting to police.

**Please be vigilant when entering into any personal conversation with someone you don't know**

Each month we will bring you the latest on work we are conducting throughout the county, our projects and innovative ways of tackling offences and on-going concerns that effect business.

We will also give you details of crime trends to be aware of.



Sgt Terry Jacobs

Terry has had a career on frontline local policing teams and in his most recent role managed service recovery and complaints



PC Alex Plakhtienko

Alex has extensive partnership experience working in Community Policing Teams within South Essex



PC Michael Lee

Michael has worked within partnership policing for several years and leads the force CSAS training accreditation.



PSE Katie Roberts

Katie is an experienced analyst and joins the Business Crime Unit from her previous role in force performance analysis

If we can offer any advice or reassurance, please contact us at

**[business.crime.unit@essex.police.uk](mailto:business.crime.unit@essex.police.uk)**

