



Keeping track on missing - P2-3



European hunt to find fugitives- P4



Cyber lessons in the class - P11



Weight loss pills are a danger - P20



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COMMUNITY WATCH MAGAZINE ESSEX

CrimeStoppers.
0800 555111

HOW YOU CAN HELP VICTIMS OF MODERN SLAVERY - P6-7

New faces

RICK Hylton and Moira Bruin are officially in post as the new Essex County chief fire officer and Moira is our deputy chief fire officer.

Rick joined Essex County Fire and Rescue Service in 2019, and Moira joined the Essex service in 2012, after 18-years in Scotland.

Hi-tech cash

ESSEX Police is splashing out more than £1 million on new cars and camera technology in a bid to reduce to the number of fatal and serious crashes to zero by 2040.

Crime Commissioner Roger Hirst has given the go ahead to spend £1.5m on 'high-performance' vehicles and new dashcam technology.

Security alert

THOUSANDS of online shoppers have potentially had their bank details "skimmed" on the checkout page of small business websites.

The National Security Centre uncovered more than 4,000 incidents where business websites have been unknowingly leaking customers' financial details to hackers.

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Meet the team that has...



PC Celia Catchpole and PC Smith on patrol

ESSEX Police Inspector Mark McQuade, PC Celia Catchpole, and acting Sergeant Greg Dickinson are lifesavers, but their valuable work is hardly seen by the public.

They form part of the Southend Policing Team and one of their key roles is tracking down missing people across the County.

Essex Police gets an average of 23 calls a day to find missing people. Between 1 November 2020 and 31 October 2021, 6,524 people in Essex were recorded as missing and more than 99% were found. In the Southend district, that figure was 600 during the same period.

After making initial inquiries, around 18 people a day are recorded as missing – the others will have returned home, made contact or will have been found quickly by family or friends.

The sea attracts people missing from other areas. They go to the seafront to clear their heads, they go with friends or they go along on their own if they are feeling down.

Then, of course, last year more people holidayed in the UK due to the pandemic. Footfall increased in Southend with more families spending their time in the town

On each shift, every district's local policing team dedicates officers to search for missing people – that's every shift, 365 days a year.

People go missing for all sorts of reasons. Some may be depressed or have other mental health issues. In the case of people with dementia or young children, they may simply have wandered off or got lost.

Many are teenagers who go missing from home or from care homes – often they will stay with friends without telling parents or staff where they are going or what they are doing.

What happens when you report a person as missing?

"We will want to know what basic enquiries have already made with the family and friends. Some missing people will go to to see a friend to try to clear their heads if they have worrying thoughts or just need some support," said Inspector Mark McQuade, of Southend Local Policing Team

"We will ask if they have tried to contact the person themselves, where they think the person might be or possibly go, what places or addresses are important to them, what their habits are and what items they might have with them. This helps us to make the correct risk assessment.

"Our local policing team may ask community policing team colleagues to help with the search. They will also liaise with council CCTV teams and street wardens.

"The National Police Air Service helicopter may be called in, police search advisers will also undertake a behavioural analysis and can also call upon police search teams and volunteers from Essex Search and Rescue.

"We take everything into consideration – a person's age, disabilities, their current mental health and any new change of circumstance which may have triggered them to go missing.

"For example, have they recently been bereaved, do they have money worries or have they made threats to harm themselves?

"With younger people, we want to know if they have recently acquired new clothes, which could be a sign of supply of money, possibly acquired because they are being groomed or are involved with gangs.

Continued page 3

...a mission to find missing people

From page 2

"With older people, we will want to know what clothes they are wearing as they may not be equipped for the prevailing weather conditions or, if they have taken a bag with them, it may show they have prepared to leave home and that they may just need some time on their own.

"If the person missing has dementia or is otherwise vulnerable, we ask if the informant has completed the Herbert Protocol form, which can often provide us with valuable information.

"Is video doorbell footage available – this may show when the person left home, what they were wearing and which direction they were going.

"And, of course, we have the potential to track phones if the risk assessment is severe enough and, of course, if it is required."

Normally, local policing team officers are the first police officers you are likely to see at an incident but searching for missing people means they will visit places police wouldn't usually be seen and engage with people who don't often come into contact with officers.

In Southend, as well as making inquiries based on what is known about the missing person and their background, officers will also check the High Street, along the seafront and near the skate park.

If someone goes missing regularly, officers usually know where to look for them. For example, young people often go and stay with friends.

Officers will contact them to make sure they are alright and to provide the correct safeguarding.

That can be as simple as asking them to keep their phone on them, ensure it's switched on and they are contacting friends and family if they are away from their care home and to give us addresses where they are likely to go.

Officers will also try to find out if they are being exploited by criminals and make them aware of the dangers.

"We want to stop other people getting them into trouble and all the infor-



PC Celia Catchpole searching Southend seafront for missing people

mation we gather helps us to find them and make sure they are alright."

But what happens if police have no information about the person, other than a concern for their welfare?

There are still inquiries officers can make, says acting Sergeant Greg Dickinson, of Basildon local policing team, who recently responded to a call from a pub in Basildon after one of its customers left a note, which caused staff concern.

"Officers checked CCTV which showed the man leaving the pub wearing distinctive clothing so we tracked him on CCTV until we 'lost' him in the market," said Sgt Dickinson.

"As we didn't have any of his details, it caused us a challenge. Often, people will have gone missing previously and we'll have their details, which we can use to

find all sorts of useful information to assist our investigation.

"This will include addresses they frequent, people they talk to, associates, family members, vehicles they use."

"But this time we had nothing to go on except what the person looked like. So, we checked all the CCTV 'black spots' in the town centre, then the railway station, the bus station, the car parks and the underpasses. We also spoke to market and shop staff and members of the public.

"Colleagues had already spoken to pub staff to see if the man had used his debit or credit card to pay for drinks. Unfortunately, he'd used cash.

"But we persevered because of our concern. Using his picture, we finally got a name and located a phone number and found the man was OK."

Do you have a vulnerable relative or friend who may go missing?

If you care for a vulnerable relative or friend, sign up to the Herbert Protocol if they regularly go missing or you are concerned that they might start doing so.

Having details of any medication they take, places they have been found before, mobile phone numbers and a recent photograph ready to hand can help our officers to locate them and it also saves you the strain of having to remember this information.



Sgt Dickinson at the bus station

Tax scams drop

SCAM HMRC phone calls have fallen by 97% over the last 12 months with latest HM Revenue and Customs figures revealing a downward trend over the past year.

Reports of scammers impersonating HMRC in phone calls peaked at 79,477 in March 2021 and fell to just 2,491 in December 2021.

The fall in scam call reports has also been seen elsewhere with an 92% drop in phishing email reports and a 97% drop in scam text reports.

Hollywood hoax

ONLINE daters have been warned about the dangers of fake celebrity profiles after a woman was duped out of thousands of pounds by a fraudster posing as Hollywood star Nicolas Cage.

The woman believed she was exchanging messages with the actor on Facebook and lost about £10,000 in the scam, the charity Victim Support revealed.

Reports of romance fraud have soared during the pandemic but a senior detective said they were "the tip of the iceberg" as many victims are too embarrassed to come forward.

Bogus beauties

SEVENTEEN per cent of women have knowingly purchased a counterfeit product online according to the Government's Intellectual Property Office.

Social media has had an impact on this figure with 13% of female participants aged 16-60 saying they were influenced by social media endorsements,

Europe put on alert for fugitives on the run



Mark Roberts



Dean Garforth



John James Jones



Callum Alpin

SOME of the UK's most wanted fugitives, believed to be hiding in the Spanish sunshine, are the subject of a new appeal over crimes including drive-by shootings and major drug dealing operations.

National Crime Agency (NCA) officials want people to contact them with information, insisting the country that has long been popular with British criminals fleeing justice is "not a safe haven".

They say they aim to apprehend the men - whose alleged crimes also include supplying firearms and ammunition - after a previous campaign resulted in 86 people being arrested.

Among those being sought is 41-year-old **Nana Oppong** wanted by Essex Police for the drive-by murder of grandfather Robert Powell, 50, who was shot eight times with a 9mm pistol in June 2020. It is alleged he and the victim were from rival criminal factions.

Also being hunted is 30-year-old **Jack Mayle** of Caterham, Surrey, who is suspected of running a drug line supplying MDMA and other substances in south London, allegedly working with a dark web drugs supplier.

The appeal also features **Callum Halpin, 27**, of Beede Street, Openshaw, Manchester, who is wanted by Greater Manchester Police for the murder of drug dealer Luke Graham, 31, and the attempted murder of Anton Verigotta. Five men were jailed in July 2019 over the execution.

Mark Francis Roberts, of Freehold Street, Fairfield, Liverpool. Wanted by Merseyside Police. Crime - alleged grievous bodily harm and attempted robbery of a man's £60,000 Richard Mille watch. The victim was so badly injured he suffered life-threatening injuries and was treated in a critical care unit for puncture wounds, a collapsed lung and many lacerations. Links to Scotland and Spain.

These are seven of the men being hunted across Europe by police, and the crimes they are wanted for:

Benjamin McCann of Halfpenny Lane, Dereham, Norfolk. Crime - alleged supply of multiple kilograms of cocaine. Links to Barcelona.

John James Jones, wanted by Lancashire Police. Crime - alleged stabbing of two people numerous times, causing serious injuries. Has links to Madrid.

Dean Garforth, wanted by Cheshire Police. Crime - allegedly involved in a well-established organised crime group in Lancashire supplying significant quantities of cocaine and cannabis and involved in trading firearms and ammunition. Links to Spain.

One fugitive was captured in Spain by an off-duty police officer less than 24 hours after the Europe-wide appeal was launched.

Anyone with information can call Crimestoppers, anonymously, on 0800 555 111 or contact them online at <https://crimestoppers-uk.org>. Callers in Spain should call the freephone Spanish number 900 926 111, which will be answered by CrimeStoppers in the UK



Jack Mayle



Nana Oppong



Benjamin McCann

317 E-scooters seized



Essex police officer with one of the confiscated scooters

THE number of e-scooters seized by Essex Police has risen tenfold in the space of a year and their days are "limited", the county's crime commissioner has said.

Essex's Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Roger Hirst, made the statement as figures show that in 2020 just 38 e-scooters were seized by Essex Police But, in 2021, the seizures had risen to 317.

But rental e-scooter trials in five towns and cities in Essex are being extended for another year to allow for more evidence to be gathered as part of planning for their role in the future of sustainable transport.

Mr Hirst said: "My personal view is I don't think they will be a thing for very long because they are clearly not safe.

"I don't know when the pilots are going to be assessed but we certainly have feedback which in terms of kilometres travelled they are pretty dangerous."

Initially trials were expected to operate until October 31, 2021, but the Department for Transport requested for trials in Basildon, Braintree, Brentwood, Chelmsford and Colchester be extended until November 30 this year to allow for the collection of more evidence of their safety.

Trials in Clacton-on-Sea were halted at the

end of October 2021 when Tendring District Council decided it no longer wanted it to continue.

Essex Police has said its aim is to keep everyone safe on roads and footpaths by educating owners and riders of privately-owned e-scooters about the current legislation and, where necessary, take enforcement action.

The rider of a privately-owned e-scooter being used in a public area is required to hold a driving licence and insurance, but many people are not aware of this.

By educating riders and encouraging them not to use privately-owned e-scooters in a public area, Essex Police hopes the number of e-scooters being used illegally, and any perceived anti-social behaviour, will be reduced.

But they warned that if riders continue to flout the law they could have their scooters seized and destroyed.

"It is astonishing how many people don't know the law. They think just because it is being sold in a bike shop they are legal. They are not," added Mr Hirst

"If we see anyone riding a scooter without a helmet they are advised to go home as well. If it is someone they have seen before they can take them to one side, take it off them and crush it."

Anti-drug spray goes on trial

BRAINTREE police officers are trialling a new anti-drug spray to try and tackle anti-social behaviour in the county.

As part of the police's plan, officers visited licensed and public venues in Braintree and Witham's town centres where they coated surfaces with the substance.

If ingested, the clear substance can cause a foul taste which can remain in the mouth for hours due to a bittering agent.

The initiative has been launched and funded by the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership. It is the first of its kind in Essex.

PC Caroline Marsay, who has led the initiative, said: "The vast majority of visitors to pubs, bars and venues do so sensibly and safely to enjoy their free time with friends.

"Unfortunately, there are still a small number of people who choose to take recreational drugs while visiting these premises, which not only poses a real danger to themselves, but has an impact on the wider community.

"It makes people feel unsafe, can lead to violence and ultimately funds organised crime.

"We're always considering new tools and initiatives to keep you safe and I'm extremely proud to have been part of this step forward to deter drug taking."

Offences rose from 1,568 last October to 1,709 the following month.

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How you remain anonymous.

We're an independent charity giving people the power to speak up about crime, 100% anonymously.

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- Your number can't be seen
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- The telephone line is scrambled – it is impossible to redial or track the source of your call
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Modern slavery is increasing - this is how you can help

WITH the pandemic lockdown restrictions being lifted, the charity Crimestoppers, has been raising awareness about the escalating issue of modern slavery and highlighting the ways in which you can help put a stop to this horrendous crime.

What is modern slavery?

Modern slavery takes many forms and is happening across the UK today. Last year, the number of victims in the UK hit a record high, with more than 10,000 potential victims of trafficking, slavery, and forced labour identified.

Modern slavery is essentially the exploitation of other people, against their will, for personal or commercial gain. Yet, there is a general consensus that this crime is difficult to spot.

Crimestoppers is helping rectify this problem. With our new campaign **#SlaveryonYourDoorstep** we are raising awareness about the severity of the crime and how to spot the signs.

This is so you can help spot these vic-

tims and tell us about them 100% anonymously on 0800 555 111 or via their website, <https://crimestoppers-uk.org>. Public information will play a critical role in safeguarding victims and catching the criminals who are involved in this form of exploitation.

Signs that someone might be a victim of modern slavery include:

- Showing signs of injury, abuse, and malnourishment
- They look unkempt, are often in the same clothing and have poor hygiene
- Appearing to be under the control and influence of others
- Living in cramped, dirty, overcrowded accommodation
- They have no access or control of their passport or identity documents
- Appearing scared, avoiding eye contact, and being untrusting
- They may allow others to speak for them when addressed directly, rather than speak for themselves
- They're collected very early and/or re-

turned late at night on a regular basis

- May have inappropriate clothing for the work they are performing, and/or a lack of safety equipment
- May be isolated from the local community and their family
- They travel only with other workers

Crimestoppers know that it can feel awkward or embarrassing when you suspect but are not certain that modern slavery is happening. Its hidden nature makes it more difficult to spot.

But sometimes, you'll have a hunch that something is just not right. That's when you can pass on what you suspect without giving any personal details, thanks to Crimestoppers' anonymity guarantee. We're here to give you an option if you don't want to talk directly to the police.

To find out more visit our website bit.ly/3HuIVZ3 where you can also learn about the other organisations we work with in combatting modern slavery and safeguarding victims.



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BuyWithConfidence.gov.uk



LOCKDOWNS and the ease of buying goods online from the comfort of the sofa mean that more of us have been clicking to make our electrical purchases, and fewer of us are inclined to step to our local High Street or retail park.



The convenience and choice of online can be a benefit, but there can be product safety implications. This advice from Trading Standards is intended to provide some buying tips and warnings, drawing on the experience of experts.

Trading Standards supports the view of the charity Electrical Safety First - the Safety Experts - (www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk) that to protect yourself and your home from the risks associated with dangerous electrical products, only buy from a retailer that you know and trust.

Continued page 9

UNSAFE GOODS

WHEN goods are sold to consumers, the goods must be safe as well as free from faults and as described. Product Safety laws help you from being harmed by what you have or use in your home, or while out and about. You can take practical steps to protect yourself and your family:

- Check before you buy – think carefully about who and where you are buying from.
- Follow detailed advice on buying electrical goods online, available from Electrical Safety First - the Safety Experts
- Examine and follow the product instructions provided. They are designed to help you use the product safely.
- If an unsafe product causes injury to you or your family or damage to your property, you may be able to claim compensation, depending on the circumstances.

If you are concerned about the safety of a product, contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline.



Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for useful leaflets to share with your friends and family. Don't take chances, follow our advice and stay safe.



...spark to avoid danger

From page 8

You can do that on the High Street, or from a reputable retailer's website. If something does go wrong, there should be a UK-based business to back you up and sort it out.

Buying second-hand can be good for sustainability, and not everyone has the budget to afford new, but there are high risks associated with buying pre-owned electricals, especially at boot fairs and from online platforms.

Supporting a local charity shop who recondition and test second-hand electrical items before you buy them is a safer bet, and you are doing your bit for those in need.

Look for the proof that items have been Portable Appliance Tested (PAT), such as a dated green sticker.

Trading Standards officers work at ports and airports checking unsafe goods coming into the country, with a high proportion of electrical and electronic products headed for online selling platforms being unsafe or non-compliant.

That means poor design and construction standards leading to risk of fire or electric shock and poor user instructions overlooking key safety messages.

Often, there is no UK-established business to take responsibility for the goods, and fake branding and approval marks can give false legitimacy to inferior goods.

Typical products found to fail British Standards include –

- Replacement chargers for phones, tablets and laptops
- Personal care products (e.g. hairdryers and hair straighteners)
- LED Floodlights
- Table Lamps
- Travel Adaptors
- eScooters



Empty office - photo by Jose Losada of Unsplash

Here are some checks you can do when buying online, focusing on seller integrity and the legal requirement to be UK-based –

- Ensure the retailer has given a credible UK geographical address on their Contact Us page. Avoid if there is only a contact form or email.

- Some overseas or bogus sellers give virtual office addresses in the UK. These might be serviced offices or accountancy firms that will forward mail and messages. With a little online detective work you may find that a swanky central London office is little more than a mailing address to hide behind.

- On online selling platforms (e.g. Amazon) click on the seller's details to see if they are based in Shenzhen or Shenfield.
- Poor or oddly phrased English on listings can be a sign of masquerading overseas sellers.
- Read one star or poor reviews to check for any clues on safety issues.
- Do you know the brand? Many unsafe electricals have unfamiliar brand names. Avoid.

If after receiving your goods you have any safety concerns, wherever the goods are from, you can report it to Trading Standards by contacting the Citizens' Advice Consumer Helpline 0808 223 1133



Plugs and chargers can be faulty and can easily go up in flames

Buy from a UK business so you have genuine back-up

Mobile phone chargers are an example of faulty goods

To find a reputable trader approved and vetted by Trading Standards visit www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk

For general help and advice or to report a problem with a trader you can telephone the Citizens Advice Consumer helpline on **0808 223 1133**





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you can
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Buy With Confidence

The only nationally available business approval scheme that's owned, controlled and operated by Trading Standards services

It can be difficult to know who to trust. That's why Trading Standards created Buy With Confidence. Fully trained Trading Standards professionals independently check, vet and monitor businesses, who will treat you fairly.

So, whether you need a plumber, electrician, roofer or anything else, visit **BuyWithConfidence.gov.uk** to find Trading Standards Approved businesses you can trust.



Cyber crime lessons on the school curriculum

A NEW initiative to divert young people away from criminality has been launched after cyber attacks designed to block access to schools' networks or websites more than doubled during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data from the National Crime Agency's National Cyber Crime Unit (NCCU) shows there was a 107 per cent increase in reports from the police cyber prevent network of students as young as nine deploying DDoS (distributed denial of service) attacks from 2019 to 2020.

Many referrals into the NCCU's Prevent team are for children of secondary school age, with the median age at 15 and the youngest at nine.

Now the NCA and Schools Broadband, part of the Talk Straight Group, have launched a new initiative aimed to educate students who search for terms associated with cyber crime on school computers.

Instead of reaching an access denied 'block' page, students will instead see a warning message and suggested redirection to the Cyber Choices website (www.cyberchoices.uk), which aims to educate children of all ages about the Computer Misuse Act, cyber crime and its consequences.

Often referrals involve the use of stresser or booster services. These services cause DDoS attacks, denying access to a network or website of an organisation, and can cause major disruption to schools and colleges.

The initiative, which has been in trial stages, has shown a significant reduction in stresser and booster searches over four weeks.

It will now go live in excess of 2,000 primary and secondary schools ahead of a roll out to further schools and colleges across the country.

John Denley, Deputy Director of the NCA's National Cyber Crime Unit, said: "Education is a key pillar in preventing crime and these messages highlight the risks and consequences of committing cyber offences, which can result in a criminal record.

"Law enforcement plays a critical role in tackling cybercrime and keeping the country safe. School outreach is important to educate a younger audience and this initiative will



Damien Hinds

continue to help divert young people away from criminality.

"This is a great example of the private sector helping us deliver the Cyber Choices message."

Damian Hinds, Security Minister, said: "Tackling cybercrime is at the heart of the Government's new National Cyber Strategy. "We need to equip this generation with the best digital skills and to assist them in making the right choices online.

"It's great to see cooperation between law enforcement and the private sector in delivering important initiatives like this one to prevent students from getting involved in cybercrime."

David Tindall, CEO of Talk Straight, said: "By working in partnership with the NCA, we are helping to make the online world a more secure place. We're building not just safety into our web filtering, but education too, helping combat potential criminal activity proactively instead of tackling it afterwards.

"If we can educate children and inform them that these activities are dangerous and can result in criminal prosecution, we can potentially prevent a future cyber criminal."

Crooks in hiding

DUBAI, Turkey, and the Western Balkans are hotspots of criminality in the EU, according to internal reports.

"We know that a vast amount of high-value targets mastermind and enable their criminal activities while residing in these countries which are particularly attractive for European ex-pat criminals," the EU said in a memo last November.

Police from nine EU states as well as Norway, Switzerland, and the US were conducting joint operations to locate and extradite the 'untouchable' ex-pat criminals and to confiscate their assets.

Bad medicine

POLICE have issued a warning about scammers trying to sell vitamins over the phone to elderly residents who have not had their Covid 19 booster jabs yet.

Police say the vitamins which are being offered at a high price are unlikely to have any medical value.

If you think you've been the victim of a scam, report it to Action Fraud by calling 0300 123 2040

Don't get tagged

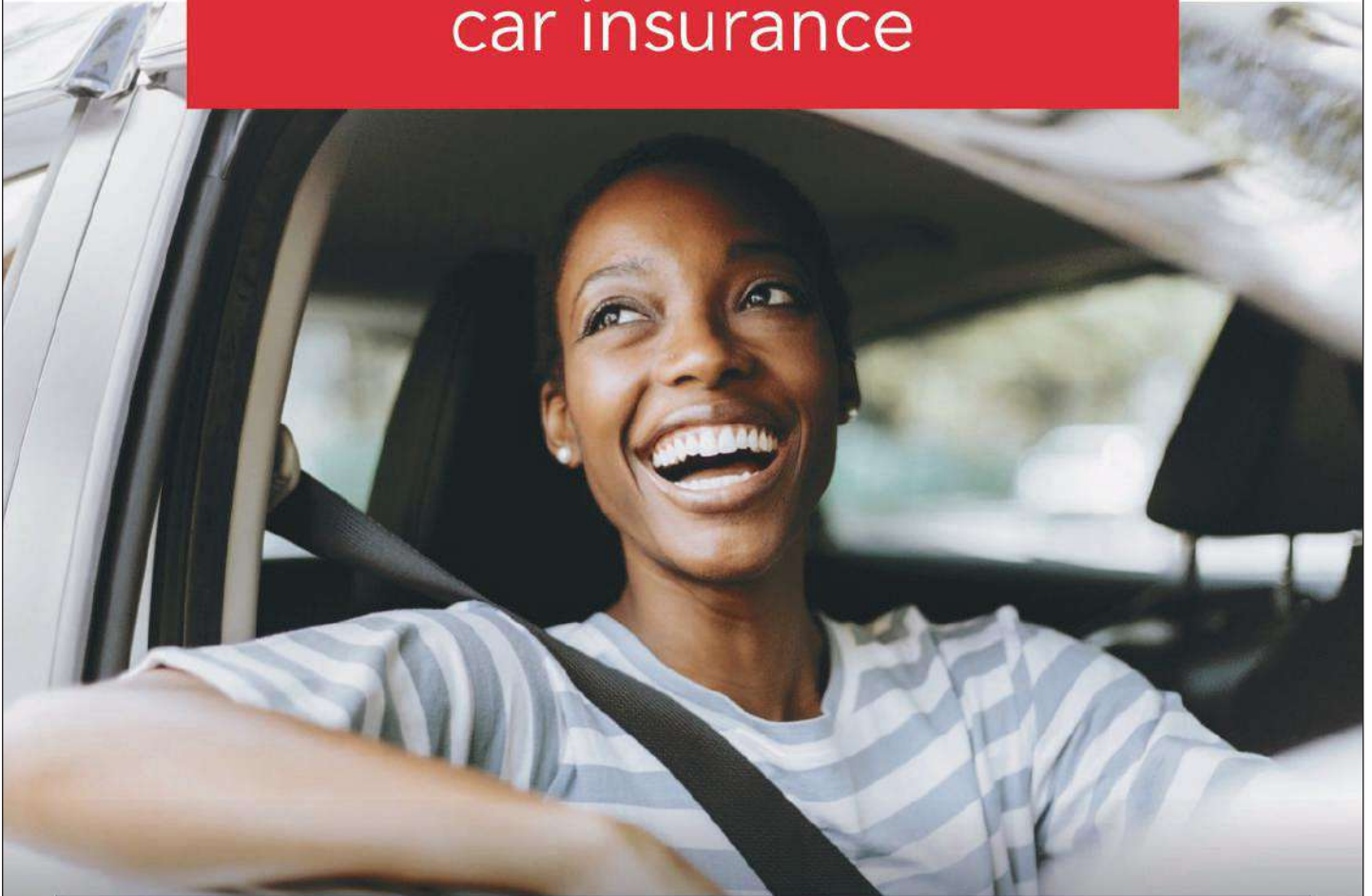
APPLE'S Air-Tags have made it easier for people to find mislaid car keys and other items, but a report from Canada suggests they may also be aiding car thieves.

They are looking into five incidents where suspects have hidden the tracking devices on vehicles so they can later locate and steal them.



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No **MOT** means **NO** insurance

FOR cars over three years old, the MOT is a mandatory part of British motoring life. During the lockdowns, the Government gave many drivers an extension on getting an up-to-date MOT, but these extensions are no longer acceptable.

You cannot drive your car if it hasn't got a valid MOT certificate, with one notable exception: you are allowed to drive it to a pre-booked MOT test.

And did you know that if you don't have a valid MOT, you aren't legally allowed to park on a road either?

If you have an accident and don't have an MOT or tax, your insurer is unlikely to cover you, and you will be liable to cover the costs of any other drivers. If your insurance is also invalid, you will fall foul of UK Law and find yourself with a fine, penalty points and possibly worse.

Automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras are everywhere, both in police cars, on the road and in car parks, and are used by various law enforcement agencies, including the police and the DVLA.

So it would be easy for a police car, passing yours to identify that your car is without an MOT.

There's a maximum fine of £1,000 if you've been driving a car with no MOT, but in most cases this will be dealt with via a fixed penalty notice and a £100 fine.

The penalty for no MOT increases to £2,500, plus penalty points, if you are driving a vehicle you know to be dangerous.

In most cases, driving without a valid MOT won't invalidate your car insurance, but it's worth checking your policy wording to check whether there's any mention of this.

However, most policies will expect your car to be in a roadworthy condition – something that isn't necessarily guaranteed simply by passing an MOT test.

If you have any queries about your car insurance cover, or concerned about any of the above issues in line with your policy, please do give your local **A-Plan** branch a call. They will be happy to help steer you in the right direction.

If you're not sure whether your MOT is still valid, you can look it up on the Government's MOT checker using your registration number. www.gov.uk/check-mot-status.



Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for useful advice to share with friends and family.

Don't take chances, follow our advice and stay safe.



CRIME AND COMMUNITY NEWS



Anthony Crowley

ATMs blown up

WORK by specialist detectives has ensured two men have been jailed for a total of almost 30 years for using explosives to steal and try to steal cash machines in Essex and London.

Between 27 November 2019 and 14 January 2020, Anthony Crowley and James Whitlock targeted eight cash machines.

They used gas, fuel and, in one case, resorted to throwing a petrol bomb, to steal ATMs from locations in Brentwood, Wickford, Clacton and West Hanningfield in Essex and Plaistow, Woodford Green, Cold Harbour and Brixton in London.

In total they stole nearly £50,000 and caused around £15,000 in damage.

Crowley, of no fixed address, was jailed for 14 and a half years and Whitlock, 36, of Alfred Terrace, Walton-on-the-Naze, got 15 years when they appeared at Basildon Crown Court.

Justice at last

MARTIN Stokes, who ran over a man outside a TOWIE hotspot then fled the country for four years, has been jailed for four years by Southend Crown Court.

Stokes drove his Audi Q7 and into a crowd of people outside The Sugar Hut in Brentwood High Street in April, 2017, causing catastrophic life-changing injuries to Jack Wilmott as he was run over while lying unconscious.

Stokes had previously tried to get into the Sugar Hut but was turned away due to him wearing trainers.

Masked crook jailed

AN Essex based cocaine kingpin who was caught red-handed packing drugs has been revealed as a drill music rapper who bragged about his crimes.

Olusogo Ajewole, who performed under the name "B-Levelz", ran the "H" line, which sold crack cocaine and heroin in the Basildon and Thurrock areas of Essex.

The 33-year-old was caught red-handed by police when they raided his home in Caspian Way, Purfleet at 6am on December 11, 2020, and found him packing around £8,000 worth of cocaine in various packages.

Police also recovered a unique mask used by Ajewole in his music videos.

Ajewole wears a mask or balaclava during his shoots and boasts about making large sums of money by getting "youngers" [young people] to sell drugs for him.

His songs also express fears of being followed by the police while the lyrics also state: "Raptor's got me on edge." Ajewole admitted conspiracy to supply controlled drugs and he was sentenced to five years and eight months in jail on Friday, 21 January at Basildon Crown Court.

Ajewole was among the first to be investigated by the Essex Police Serious Violence Unit, when it was created in July 2020. It has a focus on collating strong evidence on individuals who officers believe are causing the highest harm in Essex communities.

Sentence increased

A CONVICTED paedophile, jailed for sexually assaulting a teenage boy in Halstead, and filming himself abusing two others, has had his sentence increased by five years.

Stuart Edwards of Market Street, Thetford, was jailed for three years in October having previously admitted:

- Five counts of sexual assault;
- Three counts of taking an indecent image of a child;
- One count of voyeurism.

At the Court of Appeal, three appeal judges increased the sentence to five years in prison.

Paedophile jailed

PAEDOPHILE Michael Tonge, who abused a teenage girl, has been jailed for nine years.

Tonge, of Leamington Road, Southend, was arrested in February 2020 after a concerned member of the public reported seeing him act inappropriately towards a teenage girl in Priory Park.

Officers found hundreds of sexually explicit messages between himself and the girl on his mobile when they visited his home. The victim later disclosed that he had groomed and abused his victim over several years.

Abuse cash boost

VICTIMS of domestic and sexual abuse will receive even greater access to support in Essex thanks to an investment of more than £800,000.

The Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner (PFCC) has secured a total of £832,863 to invest in independent domestic abuse advisors and independent sexual abuse advisors.

The money is being shared between Victim Support, domestic abuse charities Changing Pathways and Next Chapter, and the consortium of rape and sexual abuse specialist support services, Synergy Essex.

50 years for dealers

ESSEX Police have taken down an entire organised crime group that was selling drugs across the county.

The group was established in 2019 by Michael Read who liaised with importers to bring large amounts of cocaine into the area.

Under him was Mark Gooch who managed their drug runners, helped prepare the cocaine and transported their money from a privately owned yard in Noak Hill.

Stephen Hart, Craig Phillips, Jeremy Goldern, Lisa Phillips, Perry Revell, Craig Gardner, and Mark Scarborough - all from either Essex, Kent, Lowestoft or London - were sentenced at Basildon Crown Court.

<https://bit.ly/3jilUbs>

CRIME AND COMMUNITY NEWS

New crime initiative launched

POTENTIAL criminals in Grays an Wickford are now facing a new enemy - a unique radio system is linking shoppas part of an anti-crime plan.

Shop Safe radios have been handed out to shops, cafes and restaurants in the town centre to help traders share information and intelligence to help thwart would-be criminals.

The same scheme was launched in Wickford last month helping to protect the many shoppers using the area and making them feel safe.

It is hoped the scheme will crack down on all forms of crimes across the town, making it a safer place to shop.

Thurrock Council leader and cabinet member for public protection and anti-social behaviour, Rob Gledhill said: "These radios will help shops work together, stay in touch, keep one another safer and share intelligence in real-time.

"This co-operation will create a situation which makes it extremely difficult for thieves to operate and will ensure those that are bent on committing antisocial behaviour offences in Grays are apprehended more quickly.

"The radio system is just one of the measures we have been able to introduce thanks to over £625,000 additional funding for Grays through the safer streets scheme.

"Combined with the additional Community Engagement Officers we have patrolling the town centre and the improvements we will make to street lighting and CCTV, we are helping to create a safer and more prosperous town centre in Grays."

Chief Insp Mark Barber, from Essex Police, also welcomed the new project, and believes it will make a difference.

He said: "This is another example of how partnership working can really help to tackle crime.

"This is about showing criminals



Lewis Simmons of Fobbing Farm Shop, which will benefit from Shop Safe

that all agencies and local businesses are working together to tackle crime and will be able to share information through this new launch."

On the 1st of February the Business Crime team, in partnership with the local Community Policing Team, local businesses and Shop Safe, introduced a new radio system in Wickford.

The aim of this scheme is to ensure better communication with all partners and improve response to theft, anti-social behaviour and any other locational issues.

The radios offer the very best digital technology to provide businesses with better voice clarity along with key fea-

tures such as panic alarm and GPS.

Wickford businesses will be able to quickly share information about shoplifters or anyone causing antisocial behaviour at the press of a button.

This scheme would allow Basildon Council's CCTV control room to be alerted about crimes to stop repeat offences and help catch those responsible.

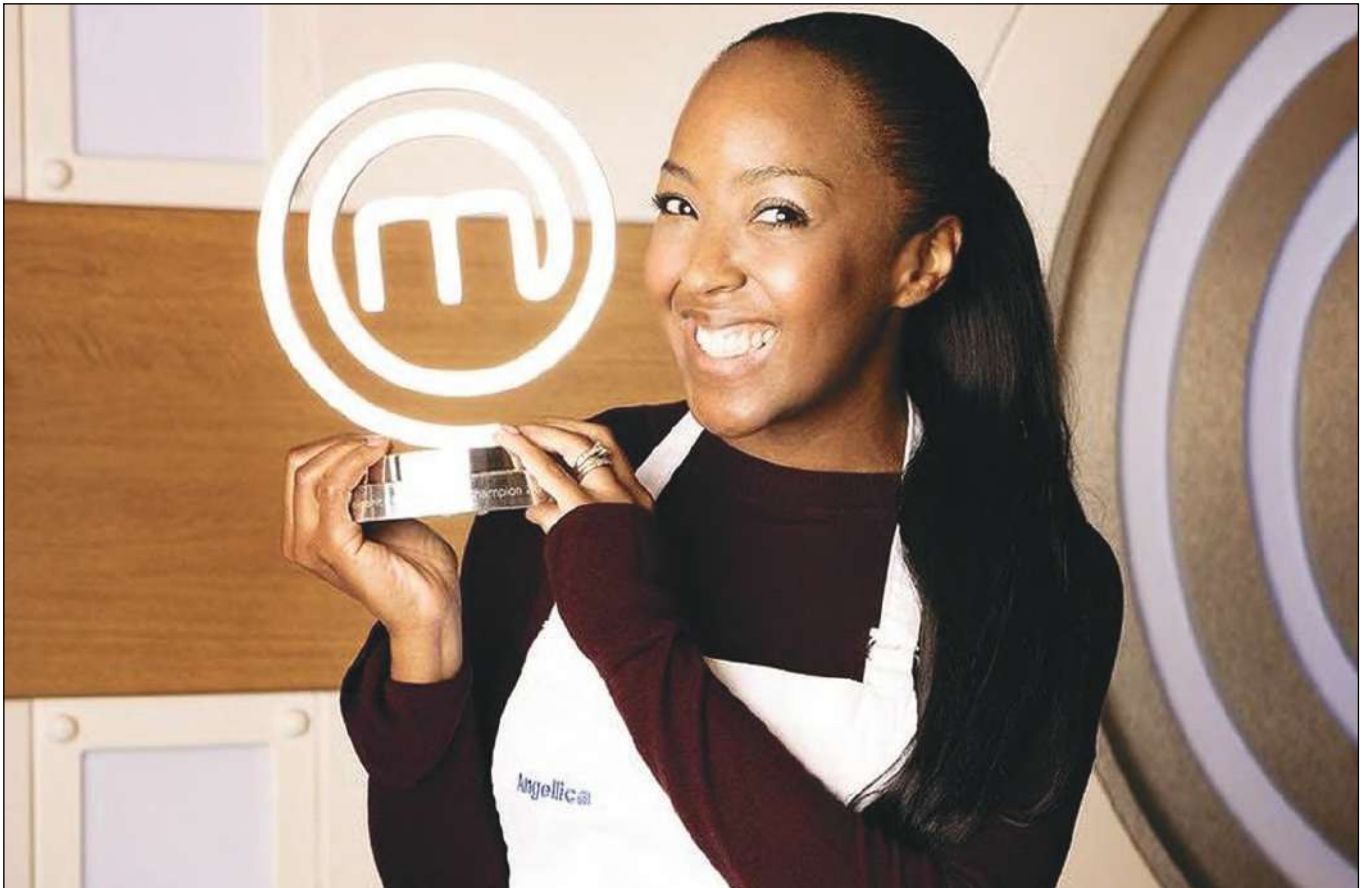
The Grays scheme is a great example of how partnership working can really help to tackle crime.

Essex Police say they are looking forward to seeing the Shop Safe system grow in this area and will review its effect in the coming months.

Thurrock NHW keeping you safe

MEMBERS of Thurrock Neighbourhood Watch Association attended a Street Safe meeting in Grays Park last month which was attended by all the partners involved in this including the council's community engagement officers and the local police. There was a good turnout and the Association also manage to sign new members providing plenty of information and handing out free material.





Angellica Bell pictured after winning Celebrity Bake-off

Ministers cracking down on the criminals ripping you off online



Matthew Upton

A NEW campaign has been launched - "The Online Rip-Off Tip-Off" - to help shoppers spot and avoid misleading online practices that could result in them being ripped off.

With almost one-third of all retail purchases now taking place online, after the pandemic fuelled a surge in internet shopping, the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has become increasingly concerned about the impact of "sneaky" sales tactics on consumers.

Research by the CMA shows that these practices, which are carefully designed to manipulate shoppers, can lead to wasted time and money, as well as anxiety and stress, and so cause significant financial and emotional harm.

In a poll of over 2,000 UK adults:

- 7 out of 10 had experienced misleading online practices
- 85% believed businesses using them were being dishonest with customers
- And 83% were less likely to buy from them in the future

It also revealed that 71% of people shopping online had encountered these tactics, and 61% described their experience as negative. This is exacerbated by the fact they are often hard to spot and people don't know how to avoid them.

The survey revealed that, of those who had experienced misleading practices, the biggest concern was hidden charges (85% of respondents), followed by subscription traps (83%), fake reviews (80%) and pressure selling (50%).

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“ This Government is working to build back fairer from the pandemic by clamping down on misleading tactics, subscription traps and fake reviews ”
 Paul Scully - consumer minister

from page 16

To tackle this, and further support its enforcement work, the CMA has launched its “The Online Rip-Off Tip-Off” campaign, fronted by TV presenter and consumer champion Angellica Bell.

Andrea Coscelli, the CMA’s Chief Executive, explained: “As online shopping grows and grows, we’re increasingly concerned about businesses using misleading sales tactics, like pressure selling or hidden charges, to dupe people into parting with their cash.

“None of us would accept these tactics in the real world. But we might not realise how much they influence what we buy online.

“So, we’ve launched “The Online Rip-Off Tip-Off” to help hand the power back to shoppers.

“We continue to crack down on practices that could break the law, such as fake reviews.

“But to tackle this problem from all angles, it’s vital shoppers are armed with the tools they need too.

“It’s only when we all know what these tricks are, and how they are designed to manipulate and mislead, that we are better equipped to avoid them.”

According to the UK-wide survey, many respondents reported wasting money on a disappointing product or experience, spent cash they couldn’t afford to or wasted time trying to undo the harm caused. 85% of those questioned believed that businesses using such practices are being dishonest with their customers, with 83% being less likely to buy from them in the future.

Angellica Bell, co-presenter of *The Martin Lewis Money Show*, sets out why it’s so important to know what you might be up against when shopping online:

“Sometimes we feel under pressure when buying online or often doubt whether a deal is too good to be true. Through the CMA’s ‘Online Rip-off Tip-off’ campaign, we want to help people, let them know the signs to look out for and how best to report a sneaky sales move.

“Just because you’re online and not on the high street, you can still take a moment to think about the purchase before you pay. Don’t feel pressured into anything, and make sure you shop around.”

The campaign also has the support of Citizens Advice, to whom consumers can report problems with misleading practices that they have encountered online.

Matthew Upton, Director of Policy at Citizens Advice, said: “While many firms play fair, too often we hear of online shoppers being duped by fake reviews, time-pressured claims or seriously dressed-up deals.

“We hope campaign helps shoppers spot underhand sales tactics - like offers that seem too good to be true or any pressure to buy now, and report them.

“By doing this we can help to bring unscrupulous traders to book, and all shop safer online.

Paul Scully, UK Government Consumer Minister, said: “I urge shoppers to take heed of the CMA’s campaign to

stay savvy online and to report problems to Citizens Advice.

“This Government is working to build back fairer from the pandemic by clamping down on misleading tactics, subscription traps and fake reviews.

“This means we’re shoulder-to-shoulder with consumers and the vast majority of businesses doing the right thing.

Case Study

Londoner Jo Robinson, 46, shares her experience: “When I was buying Christmas gifts for my girls, I spent time online researching the latest gadgets, clothing and event tickets, and spent over £800 on presents alone.

“It’s frustrating to know that many of the deals I went for weren’t the last chance to buy that I believed at the time.

“And some of the items when they arrived didn’t match the description or live up to the reviews. It makes you distrust buying off the internet.

“Lots of the deals are too good to be true and when they turn up it’s not the quality you expected so it makes you feel ripped off.”

The aim of the Online Rip-off Tip-Off campaign is to make consumers aware of these misleading online practices and provide tips on how to avoid them.

Find out more at www.gov.uk/riporff-tipoff

If people in England and Wales want further advice or wish to report a concern they should contact Citizens Advice.



NHS frauds

ACTION Fraud has warned about scam text messages pretending to be from the NHS which have swindled Brits out of more than half a million pounds in two months.

The UK's cyber crime reporting service is urging people to watch out for the messages and be wary of texts asking for personal or financial information.

Action Fraud says 412 people have been victims to the scams since January 1. In total, they have lost more than £531,000 - an average of nearly £1,300 each.

Loans for cars

OPPORTUNIST company bosses used business loans handed out by the Government to help in the recovery from Covid on luxuries like sports cars, according to Tory peer Lord Agnew.

The former Treasury Minister resigned over the handling of the government's £47bn Bounce Back Loans.

The National Audit Office estimates as much as £5bn could have been claimed fraudulently.

War scammers

CYBER-criminals are exploiting Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine to commit digital fraud. A blog post by researchers at Bitdefender Labs said they had witnessed "waves of fraudulent and malicious emails."

£1m lost to lottery fraud



Postcode Lottery ambassador Jeff Brazier on his way to a winner

NEW data from Action Fraud, the national reporting centre for fraud and cyber crime, reveals almost £1 million has been lost to lottery fraud in the past seven months.

Criminals will contact unsuspecting victims informing them they have won a lottery or prize draw. The victim is then informed that they will need to pay an advance fee in order to receive their winnings. In reality, the winnings are non-existent and it is an attempt to steal the victims money, personal or financial information.

Temporary Detective Chief Inspector Craig Mullish, from the City of London Police, said: "Criminals are experts at impersonating organisations and will mimic a number of well-known prize draws to take advantage of unsuspecting victims.

"Remember, you can't win a draw that you haven't entered so if you're contacted out of the blue claiming you've won a prize draw but can only access these winnings by paying an advance fee: stop and think as it's likely to be a scam. This could protect you and your money."

Between April and October last year, Action Fraud received 629 reports of lottery fraud, with 89 per cent of reports mentioning well-known prize draws. Impersonation of People's Postcode Lottery accounted for almost half (49 per cent) of all reports.

Almost three quarters of victims (70 per cent) were aged over 50, with those aged over

65 accounting for 40 per cent of reports.

Over half of the reports (59 per cent) mentioned being contacted via telephone. Other methods of contact reported by victims included email (21 per cent) and postal letter (10 per cent).

Almost half of victims (41 per cent) said they were asked to pay the advance fee to release the alleged winnings by purchasing gift cards and relaying codes to the fraudster.

Fraudsters use gift cards as a form of payment as they can be easily redeemed and sold on. These criminals also don't need the physical card to redeem the value and instead get victims to share the serial code on the back of the card with them.

In other instances, victims reported being asked for personal and financial information in order to obtain their alleged winnings. Some victims reported providing their bank details thinking they would be sent a small payment to verify the account. In reality, criminals will use these details to steal the victims money.

People's Postcode Lottery helps raise money for charities, big and small. Its players have raised over £800 million, since 2005, for 9,000 charities and good causes including Maggie's cancer centres, Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and the National Trust.



Cowboys getting roped in

THEY have become the scourge of many of our lives, that invisible army who hit us in the pocket.

Yes, cowboy parking operators have blighted most of us, but now they are about to be brought into line with the launch of a new code of practice, following years of campaigning for a fairer system for drivers.

The Private Parking Code of Practice outlines minimum standards expected by private parking operators and should root out the more dubious practices that have been prevalent by some operators in the sector.

Alongside this, a new national appeals system will be introduced to make it simpler for drivers to fight charges they believe are unfair.

The range of measures will:

- Reduce the maximum parking charge notice to £50 in most cases outside of London, with a 50% discount for early payment. The upper £100 limit for more serious breaches will be kept
- Ban parking debt collectors from charging additional fees when parking charge notices are not paid
- Introduce a compulsory 10-minute grace period before firms can issue a late fine and a compulsory five-minute cooling-off period in which a motorist can consider the terms and conditions and change their mind about parking
- Improve standards on signage, condi-

tions of parking and make it clearer on how to appeal a charge

- Implement a crackdown on parking firms using aggressive language to intimidate motorists into paying fines

The RAC called on the Government and MPs to act after being contacted by drivers who felt the actions of private parking companies were entirely unreasonable.

For instance, very minor breaches of car park terms and condition ranged from minor keying errors at payment machines to people receiving a charge for overstaying by seconds.

In addition to this, some operators were incentivising third parties by of-

fering them financial incentives for issuing parking charge notices.

In 2017, Sir Greg Knight MP introduced the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill which received Royal Assent in 2019 with cross-party backing and Government support.

RAC head of roads policy Nicholas Lyes said: "The RAC has campaigned for years to end the sharp practices in the private parking sector, so we welcome the new national code that will usher in higher standards.

"Alongside this, drivers can expect a lower cap on penalty charge notices, an independent appeals system and an end to rip-off debt collection fees.

"Since clamping was banned on private land, there has been a shift to ticketing instead, with the number of parking charge notices being issued rising year-on-year at alarming levels.

While some of these are justified, others are not and sadly in many cases drivers simply pay up in fear of the consequences.

RAC research found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of drivers wanted the sector to be brought under some form of regulation.

"This package of measures is not about stopping parking operators doing their jobs, it's about creating a system that is fair and transparent for all," added My Lyes.



Nicholas Lyes





Southgate slams currency crooks

ENGLAND football boss Gareth Southgate has sought legal advice after his name was falsely used in a cryptocurrency scam.

A bogus email claiming the Three Lions boss made a killing using a crypto trading platform has recently been circulated to thousands of emails addresses.

A spokesperson for the 51-year-old said: "The details about Mr Southgate in this story are completely untrue and his name has been used without permission.

"As such, his management team are taking legal advice on the matter."

The email claimed Southgate went on The Ellen DeGeneres Show to discuss his success in the crypto market.

Southgate guided England to their first major final since the 1966 World Cup last summer, leading them to the ultimate match of Euro 2020 at Wembley.

But Southgate is not the first high profile person to be used in a publicity campaign by cryptocurrency firms - money expert Martin Lewis, Good Morning TV presenter Holly Willoughby and Dragons Den star Deborah Meaden have also hit back at the fake stories that have been aired on social media.

Weight loss pills are a danger to health

CHRISTMAS is the time of year when we are all guilty of tucking into excesses of turkey and Xmas pudding, then looking to sign up for gym membership, joining one of the many weight-loss clubs or planning a strict diet.

But here's a warning from **Which?** after an investigation found dozens of weight loss supplements containing potentially dangerous ingredients were being sold on eBay, Wish and AliExpress, at a time when the consumer champion continues to call for online marketplaces to be given greater legal responsibility for the safety of products sold on their sites.

Which? uncovered listings for the substances despite their potential side-effects including increased blood pressure and heart rate. High doses of the drugs could lead to strokes, heart attacks and kidney damage.

Often marketed to body-conscious people as weight loss supplements and workout enhancers, the two substances - yohimbine and synephrine - are ingredients that the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has said have "considerable potential to cause harm if used without medical supervision or advice."

However despite these warnings and the fact that yohimbine and synephrine are not meant to be routinely available for sale without medical supervision, **Which?** was able to purchase and have delivered a sample of three items each from eBay, Wish and AliExpress respectively.

Of the nine products **Which?** purchased, two carried no health warnings or dosage information at all. One had the name of the ingredient - in this case yohimbine - clearly visible on the outer packaging, though it still made its way into the UK and to the address of the recipient.

In response to **Which?**'s investigation, eBay and AliExpress said they had removed the product listings found by **Which?**. Wish said it was in the process of removing them, though at the time of writing yohimbine and synephrine products were still available on the site.

Sites have told **Which?** they will take down listings when they are reported, but it does not appear as though measures to prevent listings appearing in the first place are working, or that the marketplaces are adequately monitoring for those listings to take them down.

Prices on the supplements varied considerably. Some items were priced from as little as £2.39 plus postage, though some capsules were priced at more than £80.

They were available to be shipped from countries including India, the USA, Ukraine and Poland, with many offering free postage.

Toxicology expert Dr James Coulson, a member of the UK's Committee on Toxicology, told **Which?** that common symptoms could include agitation, aggression, nausea, and increased heart rate and blood pressure.

He said: "When it comes to these drugs the critical effects we are concerned about is their effect on the sympathetic nervous system and particularly their effect on blood pressure" and "if you'd taken a lot of it you'd then start to see the effects of secondary organ damage."

Both supplements are popular among some bodybuilders and gym goers but there have been warnings of potential side effects, while some consumers have reported unverified concerns about them on social media and forums.

