



NIFC COMMUNITY AWARENESS UPDATE



NIFC COMMUNITY AWARENESS UPDATE 2/24 (2 Apr 24)

(The Community Awareness Update provides general information to enable personnel to keep up-to-date with routine correspondence; it is not provided for mission-related items and does not replace the Emergency Messaging System.)

WELCOME TO ALL OUR NEW 'FAMILY' MEMBERS; THE COMMUNITY AWARENESS UPDATE IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE YOU WITH, HOPEFULLY, INFORMATIVE AND USEFUL INFORMATION.

CONTENT:

- **PICKPOCKETS?**
- **SUSPICIOUS EMAIL OR TEXT MESSAGE?**
- **SCAM ALERT.**
- **HATE CRIME.**
- **COUNTY LINES?**
- **REPORT A CRIME.**

PICKPOCKETS?

Spring is here and your thoughts might be turning to more travel adventures - from a day in London to a weekend in Bruges, Edinburgh, Paris..... No matter where you are, take appropriate precautions to protect your valuable and attractive items - from phones to wallets and purses (*and even yourself*).

Don't let them pocket it:

- You may have an idea of what a pickpocket looks like but they're far less likely to stand out in a crowd than you might think since blending in is part of how they avoid being caught. Here's how to spot a potential pickpocket and avoid losing your belongings to one.

How to spot a pickpocket:

The observers:

- These include people loitering in public places who appear to be checking out passers-by, paying particular interest to their handbags, shopping bags and where they might place their wallet or purse.
- For example, be aware of individuals who appear to be focusing their attention on the waist area of others. This may be an indication of criminal intent and probable theft. But do bear in mind the fact that some people are naturally shy and do avoid eye contact. Always follow your instincts.

The opportunists:

- Pickpockets also operate in shops and department stores, where people are more likely to be standing still, distracted and so paying less attention to their belongings, making them an easier target.
- Be more aware of your surroundings in busy shops and shopping centres because they're ideal places for pickpockets, as it's easier for them to brush past people, take items and blend into the crowd.

Is it an emergency? Call 999

If it is not life threatening: Call 101 for the Civil Police; Call 111 for the NHS.

If you want to report a concern anonymously, you can report it via the Crimestoppers website or via their hotline on: 0800 555 111.

NIFC (24/7): 01480 847013



NIFC COMMUNITY AWARENESS UPDATE



Team tactics:

- Pickpockets don't always operate alone, they may work in teams to distract the target while someone unseen removes the items and blends back into the crowd. Another member might step in as an enforcer in the event of an altercation.

Crowding in:

- Thieves vary their tactics based on the location and the density of the crowd. One tactic is where a group of them push up against a victim in a crowded shop or street then quickly reach into the victim's pocket and steal their wallet, phone or purse.

Dirty tricks:

- Remember, pickpockets are very skilled at what they do. They know all the tricks and are extremely light-fingered with most of their thefts only taking a second or two. One of their tactics is 'hugger mugging' where a thief will appear to be over-friendly for no particular reason and hug you while pickpocketing you.

The point of distraction:

- Pickpocket teams are adept at creating distractions. This could be anything from a game to a loud shout, all designed to avert your attention while an unseen accomplice steals your valuables. So do try not to be easily distracted.

Are you a prime target?

Do:



- Do keep purses and bags closed and secure at all times.
- Do carry bags in front of you or diagonally across your chest.
- Do return cards to your purse or wallet quickly and zip it up or button it.
- Do use a purse that's difficult to open. One that zips or snaps shut is best, and keep it closed.
- Do use a money belt if you're carrying a significant quantity of cash.
- Do conceal your wallet in a buttoned or zipped pocket where it doesn't bulge.
- Do keep a list, separate from your wallet and phone, of contact numbers of family in case your phone is stolen.
- Do keep a photocopy of your airline tickets, passport, credit cards and any other documents that would be impossible or inconvenient to replace if stolen.

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Don't:



- Don't hang stuff on the back of a chair.
- Don't leave anything on the back of a pushchair.
- Don't place your belongings out of sight on the floor.

Remember, having a zipped bag doesn't mean you're totally safe. Thieves have been known to walk behind victims while slowly unzipping bags. Yes, they can be that bold. So, never underestimate a pickpocket.

SUSPICIOUS EMAIL OR TEXT MESSAGE?

Received an email or text that seems suspicious? Report it. Your reports enable the removal of the emails and websites criminals use to commit fraud and cyber crime.

Forward suspicious emails to report@phishing.gov.uk . Send emails to this address that feel suspicious, even if you're not certain they're a scam – it can be checked.

Forward suspicious text messages to 7726 (it's free of charge). Your provider can find out where the text came from and block or ban the sender.

SCAM ALERT

Recently, there have been reports around the country of scammers placing **fake QR codes on parking meters**, which lead unsuspecting drivers to unauthorised payment sites where they are prompted to input their personal and financial information.

Follow these top tips to avoid falling victim to these scams...

- **Verify QR codes:** Before scanning any QR code for parking payment, look for any signs of tampering or irregularities, such as scratches or tear marks on the QR code.
- **Use official payment methods:** Stick to using official payment methods and avoid making payments through unfamiliar QR codes or websites.
- **Stay Vigilant:** Be on the lookout for any suspicious behaviour around parking meters, such as individuals tampering with them or loitering nearby.
- **Report Suspicious Activity:** You can call 101 or contact CrimeStoppers to report potential scams of this nature.

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NIFC COMMUNITY AWARENESS UPDATE



HATE CRIME

Hate crime is any criminal offence that is motivated by hostility and prejudice towards a person's identity or perceived identity. The following are the five nationally monitored strands:

- Disability
- Race
- Religion/Faith
- Sexual Orientation
- Transgender Identity

Anyone can be affected by hate crime. You don't have to be a member of the group to which the hostility is targeted at. You don't have to be gay to have had homophobic abuse shouted at you. You may not be part of a religion and still have someone target you because they think you are.

Hate crimes can have a devastating impact on the victim and their loved ones. Some hate crimes start as minor incidents, which can escalate into more serious and frequent offences. Where victims suffer a series of such incidents, the cumulative effect can destroy their lives through emotional damage and long-term trauma. People are made to feel like they don't belong and will often change their lifestyles or question their identities to try and avoid further incidents.

All hate crimes can be reported to the police - you can call the police on 999 if you or someone else are in immediate danger, or you can call 101 in a non-emergency. You can also anonymously report a hate crime to CrimeStoppers, visit a local police station, or report via Stop Hate UK.

COUNTY LINES?

- County lines is a form of criminal exploitation in which **criminals groom and manipulate children and vulnerable adults** to recruit them as runners to transport drugs and cash all over the country, so that the criminals behind it can remain detached and less likely to be detected.
- This crime is often associated with other serious crimes such as sexual exploitation, violence, money laundering, modern slavery and human trafficking.
- The 'lines' refer to mobile phones that are used to control a person who is delivering drugs, often to towns outside their home county.

WHO IS TARGETED?

- Any young person can be exploited. There is no stereotypical victim of criminal exploitation though young people, male and female, aged 14-17 are most likely to be targeted by criminal groups.
- Primary school children are seen as easy targets because they're less likely to get caught and there are reports of seven-year-olds being groomed into county lines.

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- The grooming might start with them being asked to 'keep watch' but it soon escalates to them being forced to stash weapons, money, or become drug couriers.
- Children who are being exploited by gangs for their criminal purposes are victims and should be safeguarded, not criminalised.
- **Children are often mistakenly viewed as having made a 'choice' to engage in criminal behaviour.** Due to the grooming process children involved in criminal exploitation can often not see themselves as victims. Children and young people who are being exploited may not always look or act vulnerable which can further complicate the issue of supporting the child to be recognised as a victim.

HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE GROOMED INTO CRIMINAL EXPLOITATION?

- Young people are groomed into exploitation and abuse both online and offline. Peer grooming is common and can take place in schools, social media and contexts where children meet. Social media is used in multiple ways, to glamorise/normalise drug selling/gang involvement and criminality, but also used to sell and advertise the drugs.
- A lot of these children are targeted by criminal gangs because they haven't got a family or security. Likely to be trapped in poverty, they are picked off the street, having nowhere else to go, and are made to feel part of a family.
- Children and young people are groomed with gifts and affection. They can receive money, and other items but equally they can receive non-tangible returns such as the feelings of protection, belonging and even love, but soon the abuse starts and the child is trapped in a cycle of horror.
- In addition to transporting and selling drugs, they may also be sexually abused, forced into labour, made to launder money for criminals through their own bank accounts, or coerced into committing crimes.

WHERE ARE CHILDREN AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE TARGETED?

- Young people can be exploited and abused anywhere. They are targeted and groomed for criminal exploitation across all areas of the UK. One current trend is young people being targeted in cities to sell in less drug saturated new locations and children from those areas also being targeted to sell drugs.
- Public spaces where exploitation may be most visible to the public include **parks, supermarkets, transport, banks** and online environments like **gaming platforms and social media**.
- **Buses, trains, trams and coaches** are used to facilitate the movement of a young person when they're being exploited. **Fast food outlets and roadside services** may be used for amenities and food stops. **Hotels, salons and car washes** may be places where exploitation happens 'behind closed doors'.
- Victims are transported around the country, often taken far from home, to live in drug dens known as 'trap houses' where there can be horrific conditions and from where they will be made to sell drugs for anything from a few days to six weeks or more.

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REPORT A CRIME

Is it an emergency?

- Does it feel like the situation could get heated or violent very soon? Is someone in immediate danger? Do you need support right away? If so, please call 999 now.
- If you have a hearing or speech impairment, use the textphone service **18000** or text on **999** if you've pre-registered with the emergencySMS service.
- If you've witnessed or been the victim of crime please report it to the police.
- Reports are dealt with by a control room in exactly the same way whether you report it online or by telephone.
- Before you give details of the crime, you will be asked a few questions to make sure you go to the relevant online form.

Wherever you are, whatever the situation....



**If you see something, say something.
Stay Alert, Stay Alive!**

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