

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
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To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 26 June 2019

Decision No: N/A

Subject: An Update on the Prevalence and Impact of Doorstep Crime in Kent

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: N/A

Future Pathway of Paper: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Summary: This report provides an update on the prevalence and impact of Doorstep Crime in Kent and explains the actions to be taken to by Trading Standards in better sharing and using intelligence sources.

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and discuss the report.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report highlights the significant impact of Doorstep crime (on vulnerable adults and identifies steps to improve the effective identification and protection of 'at-risk' residents by KCC and other partners.
- 1.2 Preliminary analysis of data related to the doorstep crime and scams in Kent was produced by the KCC Public Protection Group's Intelligence team in 2018, and it showed that in 2017 reported losses to victims in Kent from scams totalled £3.6 million, of which nearly £2.6 million (72%), related to Doorstep Crime. Losses quoted for 2017, later in this report, were not consistently included in this overall figure.
- 1.3 Unfortunately, due to recording inconsistencies, poor data quality and incomplete recording, much of the data analysed could not be relied upon and therefore it is almost certain that this figure is higher.
- 1.4 For many years enforcement agencies have pursued those perpetrating these offences with some outstanding results. Support agencies, charities and businesses have also worked tirelessly to educate the public with numerous

campaigns of public engagement. However, the problem persists; messages are not consistent and victims in Kent still lose millions of pounds year on year.

2 Financial Abuse of Vulnerable Adults – Doorstep Crime and Scams

- 2.1 The prevalence of Doorstep Crime in Kent is high and those that it impacts on are some of our most vulnerable adults. All too often thousands of pounds are fraudulently obtained by organised criminal gangs that prey on the socially isolated, the elderly, the infirm or the unaware.
- 2.2 The 2019 National Crime Agency (NCA) Strategic Assessment of Serious and Organised Crime stated that fraud remains the most commonly experienced crime in the UK, with an estimated overall cost of £190 billion.
- 2.3 This is reflected in the steady increase in reports of fraud, rising by 12% in 2018 (National Audit Officer Report 2018) compared to the previous year. However, fraud continues to be underreported.
- 2.4 Figures from the National Trading Standards Scams Team recorded 1,889 Scam victims in Kent between 2014 and June 2018 who had lost an estimated £1,041,000. However, it is unclear if any of these are part of the loss figure quoted in 1.2.
- 2.5 Within KCC, the units in the Public Protection group including the Wardens, Trading Standards, Intelligence and Community Safety, work very closely with Kent Police in pursuing these criminals, safeguarding the victims, warning the public and running educational campaigns.
- 2.6 Trading Standards has actively investigated a number of doorstep crimes and in the last 3 years has successfully prosecuted 4 cases involving over 75 victims, for which the defendants received custodial sentences totalling 10 years and 10 months. These large complex cases were also able to provide some compensation through Proceeds of Crime Orders, totalling £198,000.
- 2.7 In addition, the Trading Standards Victim Safeguarding Officer who responds to assist the most vulnerable victims reported:
 - 2017/18 – 104 engagements with victims losing a total of £1.4 million.
 - 2018/19 – 108 engagement with victims losing a total of £1.03 million.
 - 2019/20 (to date) – 19 engagements with victims losing a total of £180,330.
- 2.8 Through direct interventions since April 2017, this Officer has been able to prevent victims losing a further £334,200. This has been achieved by early cancellation of contracts, cancelling cheques/direct debits, warning criminals to leave the victims homes, assisting victims to apply for compensation from their banks and on one occasion arranging a power of attorney for a repeat victim.

3 KCC Policy and Legal Requirements

- 3.1 The Care Act 2014 requires Local Authorities to protect adults at risk of abuse or neglect, provide information and advice and prevent the need for care and support.
- 3.2 Doorstep Crime is a form of financial abuse. It is the second most common form of abuse experienced by adults at risk (Social Care Institute for Excellence 2011).
- 3.3 Living free from harm and abuse is a fundamental human right and serious abuse is a violation of Article 3 of the Human Rights Act 1998. Local Authorities must promote Human Rights in all their functions.
- 3.4 This project supports KCC's strategic objective: *'older and vulnerable residents are safe and supported with choices to live independently'*.
- 3.5 Furthermore, the published KCC Vision 'your life, your wellbeing' promotes the principles of Adult safeguarding. Page 26 states, "Adults who are vulnerable or subjected to abuse or mistreatment will receive the highest priority for assessment and support services".

4 Tackling Doorstep Crime as a Community

- 4.1 A stakeholder group had an inaugural meeting in January 2019 to discuss the actual and perceived enablers and barriers in tackling Doorstep Crime. Attendees included KCC Trading Standards, KCC Community Safety, a victim of crime, Kent Police, District and Borough Community Safety representatives.
- 4.2 The group identified that each agency/partner is recording enforcement and victim records in different places in different ways, meaning that there are more than 10 separate victim lists, with victims receiving different levels of intervention so of which is duplication, reducing effectiveness and wasting resources.
- 4.3 The lack of coordination results in no single agency holding a definitive list of victims of doorstep crime/scams in Kent, meaning they are not able to fully instigate meaningful and impactful interventions, resulting in victims remaining unprotected and vulnerable to repeat targeting.

5 The Next Steps

- 5.1 Taking on lessons to date, Kent Trading Standards is seeking to secure funding for an Intelligence Analyst for an initial period of 12 months to:
 - Instigate and implement the sharing of victim data so that one single list is created for all victims in Kent;

- Map the current work of all relevant agencies to tackle this type of financial abuse, including education, enforcement and safeguarding;
- Evaluate each of the systems used for recording crimes and safeguarding matters and identify one system that is agreeable to and accessible by all, partners (Systems already identified: Police National Computer, Action Fraud, iBase, APP, Citizens Advice, Social Services databases); and
- Use the intelligence gathered to establish victim profiles for each of the 'scam types', establish an agreed Intelligence requirement that all agencies can use, and create an agreed single reporting method.

5.2 The dedicated Intelligence Analyst will be hosted by the KCC Public Protection Intelligence Team, which is already providing Trading Standards with all its intelligence. The team has access to a wide range of systems and has the expertise to manage this dedicated resource.

6 GDPR Considerations

6.1 Information sharing protocols would need to be agreed before the project began. Initial discussions have already taken place with the Districts and Borough Community Safety teams and Kent Police, and the response so far has been positive with full support of the project.

6.2 The DPIA will be part of this project.

7 Equalities Implications

7.1 An EqIA has been completed highlighting no negative impacts. Positive impacts were recorded in the protected groups of age and disability. A coordinated agency response and centralised victim list will allow meaningful and impactful interventions, protecting victims and preventing repeat targeting.

8 Financial Implications of Inaction

8.1 Individuals who are victims of financial abuse often have their information shared with other criminals and are repeatedly targeted, resulting in greater losses.

8.2 People defrauded in their own homes are two and a half times more likely to either die or go into residential care within a year (Statistics from the National Trading Standards Scams Team). Victims who do go into residential care will inevitably be funded by KCC at some point, causing increasing financial burden on the County Council, which is a cost that can be avoided by effective action.

8.3 An investigation by Kent County Council Trading Standards or Kent Police is likely to cost tens of thousands of pounds. Whilst costs can - and are - often recovered in Court following a successful prosecution, this can often be a long

process and all costs cannot always be recovered. Given the serious nature of the offending, a criminal who is sent to prison will not pay costs.

8.4 Clearly, prevention is better than the cure. KCC initiatives including preventative measures such as education projects should be more targeted.

8.5 Financial Abuse, by Doorstep Criminals, will continue to affect the most vulnerable members of our Communities.

9 Conclusions

9.1 Doorstep Crime is a 'Wicked Problem' and one that cannot be solved by one strategy or by agencies working in silos.

9.2 We cannot arrest and prosecute our way out of this problem.

9.3 All agencies consulted agree a common approach is required in sharing Intelligence and more targeted educational activities; prevention being better than the cure.

10 Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Committee is asked to note and discuss the report.

11 Background Documents

- Public Protection Intelligence Service report "Doorstep Crime and Scams Analysis".
- Age UK Older People, Fraud and Scams:

https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/safe-at-home/rb_oct17_scams_party_conference_paper_nocrops.pdf

- National Crime Agency Strategic Assessment of Serious Organised Crime 2019

<https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/who-we-are/publications/296-national-strategic-assessment-of-serious-organised-crime-2019/file>

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