

Distraction Burglary

STRATEGY: Crime Management

POLICY: Crime Investigation

BRANCH: Crime Management

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Practice Direction (PD) is intended to provide a framework for response to offences of 'distraction' burglary offences. Such offences include those committed by 'bogus' officials. Whilst these account for a small percentage of the reported burglaries within the Humberside Police area, they are committed against some of the most frail and vulnerable members of our community.
- 1.2 Home Office research would suggest that the average age of such victims is 81 years, three quarters are female and 90% live alone. In addition it is believed that this type of crime is massively under reported due to embarrassment or ignorance of the victim and poor police methods.
- 1.3 In terms of offenders research would suggest that they travel the country, choosing locations with a high density of older residents or mixed communities within easy access of main or arterial roads. Surveillance information suggests tens sometimes hundreds of miles are travelled between offences. Offenders move on following a concentrated period of offending. The constant movement also makes detection both difficult and expensive.
- 1.4 The effects of this crime can be catastrophic for the victim and we, the police, have a key role to play in a multi- agency approach to crimes of this nature.
- 1.5 The contents of this PD replace the guidance provided within Force Contingency Plans.
- 1.6 The legal basis for this PD is our Police Act 1997 responsibilities to prevent and detect crime.

2. AUTHORITY LEVELS

- 2.1 There are no authority levels within this PD.

3. INITIAL RESPONSE

- 3.1 As outlined above the level of under reporting, in this area of crime, is high and therefore our action at incidents, which are reported, needs to be professional and detailed. It also needs to take account of the needs of the victim. It is important to ensure that wherever possible the victim does not become a repeat victim and also that the victim does not become a prisoner within their own home. Actions taken, from the outset, will have an impact on the outcomes, it is therefore important that a wide range of options are considered.
- 3.2 In addition to the above issues it should be born in mind that whilst many such incidents are clearly identifiable as offences other are not. As an

example a distraction involving the theft of a handbag is clearly an offence. However those cases involving overcharging for services provided are far more problematic. It is therefore important that our initial response is thorough and considers all the issues.

3.3 Detailed below are some issues for consideration;

- a) Consider the likelihood that the offender(s) may still be in the locality and utilise resources to identify and locate them.
- b) Consider the use of surveillance techniques and opportunities if further evidence is required or may still be gained.
- c) Consider the surrounding area to the scene and identify house to house parameters. Research has shown that the victim's home is often not the first property that offender(s) have visited. There may be further witnesses, victims, or forensic evidence available.
- d) Victims of distraction burglary type offences can often provide useful information as to how and where the offender entered the premises, which rooms they visited and what property they touched. It is recommended that CSI/SOCO undertake a 'walk through' of the crime scene with the victim in order to determine the route taken by the offender. Scene should be given the widest possible interpretation and is not simply restricted to the house. It includes routes used and places from which occupants may have been observed. It is therefore crucial that CSI are updated with information obtained by investigators as it becomes available - most especially from house to house enquiries. This procedure has proved valuable in identifying those areas of the crime scene that would benefit from detailed forensic examination and can also assist in determining the M.O. used by the offender
- e) Check to ascertain if there are any other sources of evidence, for example CCTV coverage.
- f) Bear in mind that the victim may not be able to relate the whole story, other witnesses may be required.
- g) Consider whether and how eye-witness evidence will be recorded. In deciding upon a course of action consider the provisions of the PD entitled Witness Statement Taking and the PD regarding the provisions of 'Achieving Best Evidence' which outlines actions to be taken in relation to vulnerable witnesses and the application of special measures.
- h) Consider whether there is a need to deploy specialist investigative resources.

4. VICTIM CARE

4.1 With regards victim care the following issues should be considered;

- a) No assumptions should be made due to the age or vulnerability of the victim
- b) Consider the need to deploy a Vulnerable Witness Officer or other support services such as Victim Support Services. If such are required consideration should be given to early deployment.
- c) Use the first visit/ deployment to establish a rapport and relieve victim anxiety

- d) Consider whether there is a need to instigate the Multi- Agency Vulnerable Adult referral processes (See relevant PD or consult Duty Inspector).
- e) Victims are often in a state of trauma and may give a poor first account. Allow time for the victim's anxiety to decrease, this will increase the reliability and accuracy of the information provided.
- f) Always try to have some form of support present to assist the victim
- g) Avoid attaching blame to the victim's behaviour
- h) Keep the victim informed of any developments as required by the Victim Code this will also help in the recovery process
- i) Consider the provisions of the PD relating to 'Repeat Victims' in those instances where this is not the first offence against the victim.

5. THE ONGOING INVESTIGATION

5.1 Consideration should be given to the following issues;

- a) Consider the provisions of the PD entitled 'Crime Screening' regarding further allocation.
- b) Consult with Divisional Intelligence Officers and contact the Force Intelligence Bureau regarding the circumstances of the crime. It may form part of a sequence. Operation Liberal is a national intelligence gathering initiative that can provide useful lines of enquiry. The FIB is the SPOC for Operation Liberal. In addition the Trading Standards Office of the Local authority may hold information that can be useful.
- c) Consider the use of the media to gain evidence and raise public awareness
- d) Consider the applicability of use of 'identification methods', under the provisions of Code D, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, to identify the offender(s).
- e) Consider enlisting the help of local supervision and/ or the various taking processes to ensure the required response is properly resourced.

6. PROBLEM SOLVING AND BEYOND

6.1 There is a need to consider what can be done to prevent victims in the future. The local policing area should be examined with a view to highlighting areas that may be vulnerable to this type of crime. If there are such areas the following may be considered;

- a) target hardening of individual properties
- b) target hardening surrounding properties
- c) improving victims awareness of home security
- d) establishing multi- agency protocols regarding long term education in the target community
- e) developing a code of conduct for legitimate business callers in vulnerable areas or the introduction of a No Cold Calling Zone in a specific area.
- f) attempting to reduce social isolation through improving social networks in the area. (Community groups, neighbourhood watch and so on).
- g) Raising community awareness of this type of crime and its potential threat to the target audience.

6.2 This list of considerations is not intended to be an exhaustive. It is a matter for officers, support staff and supervisors to utilise the best means of providing an effective investigation and a sustainable crime reduction plan, which will give a long-term benefit to the community.

7. RECORDING OF CRIMES

7.1 It is essential that a full record is made regarding the details of the offence, the investigations completed and the result obtained. This recording of information is essential in those instances of more than one offence. Such recording will increase the ability of analysts to highlight crime patterns and could be of value in highlighting strands of evidence that will assist with prosecution and detection of offences.

7.1.1 The ACPO Manual regarding the investigation of volume crime states;
'Detailed crime reports are essential if links between offences are to be made and great care should be given to completing the M.O. field. Provide a written record of actual words spoken by an offender whenever possible, as an offender often uses the same story lines over and over again.

When offenders are arrested, every effort should be made to confirm their identity and ensure that similar offences are put to them. Contrary to popular belief, some offenders do admit offences.'

7.2 The recording of such information will also assist supervisors in assessing and maintaining the quality of such investigations.

8. HUMAN RIGHTS

8.1 Any action taken under the provisions of this PD will be proportionate, necessary and justifiable and for the purpose of preventing disorder or crime.

8.2 Actions taken under the provisions of this PD could be subject of scrutiny in either Civil or Criminal Courts. In addition any person aggrieved by any action taken can make use of the 'Police Complaints' procedures.

8.3 This PD is suitable for publication to the general public.

8.4 This PD will be subject to review at least every three years or sooner in the case of a change of legislation or policy.

9. RACE EQUALITY SCHEME

9.1.1 The content of this PD has been considered under the provisions of the Race Equality Scheme, as dictated by the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended), and deemed to be non – relevant

9.1.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken covering Diversity, Race, Disability, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Religion and Beliefs and Age.

10. DATE OF PUBLICATION

10.1 Draft 30.5.03

10.2 Revision and EIA completion 12.1.07

11. OTHER REFERENCES

- 11.1 Home Office – Crime Reduction – research papers regarding distraction burglaries
- 11.2 ACPO – Manual Investigation of Volume Crime – Appendix D
- 11.3 Home Office – Police research award scheme – ‘The formulation of a strategy to prevent and detect distraction burglary offences against older people’.
- 11.4 PD – Witness Statement Taking
- 11.5 PD – Repeat Victims
- 11.6 PD – Achieving Best Evidence
- 11.7 PD – Vulnerable Adult Referrals
- 11.8 PD - Scene Assessment - First Officer at Scene
- 11.9 Humberside Police Safer Homes Document