

Don't bury your head in the sand

These days, the police can't be everywhere. Here in Surrey, they face manpower shortages and the need to focus their efforts tackling serious and violent crime. This means the public needs to be much better at helping them and reducing the time officers have to spend on evidence collection.

With the help of modern technology, we can all act as their eyes and ears.

The first step is to take responsibility for what you see. Don't bury your head in the sand just because you can't be bothered, or because you're afraid criminals will find out you have reported them. The former is inexcusable, but the latter is understandable.

But if you do nothing the crime will continue and lives will be blighted.

I mentioned in a previous article that you can report crime anonymously via Crimestoppers, and your identity will always remain hidden. The police recommend you do not approach anyone acting strangely, but to report what you see to them immediately.

What if you do see something suspicious? The best thing to do is collect the evidence: things such as the time and date, a description of what is going on, vehicle registration details, any details that can identify the criminals, and so on. It's best not to openly take photographs, but if you can do it discreetly from a smartphone without using a flash, then none of the prospective criminals is going to know you've taken their picture.

The picture should be sent to the police and not posted on social media. Check any suspicious vehicle has an MOT and been taxed via the DVLA website; it takes just seconds from a smartphone or PC, and you don't have to log in.

If you do this, the police will be able to make a good judgement on the suspicious activities and respond accordingly. Put yourself in their shoes. If you make a 101 call and simply say you've seen a dodgy-looking person driving up and down your street in a van, you cannot expect the police to take the call seriously and they will probably just log it.

Instead, you could call or email them and say: "There's a white van driving up and down my road. Two men inside. One has got out twice and looked through front windows of houses. The van is a Transit, registration no. MY57 3RG, with a dent on front LH wing. Registration number is for a Vauxhall Corsa. Been up and down road three times between 11:30am and 12:30."

Now the police have something they can really use. They are aware there is a potential crime in the making and will be able to match this vehicle immediately to any other reports in the area.

Go on, it's not rocket science, and it's better than burying your head in the sand.

For more information on Crimestoppers, visit: www.crimestoppers-uk.org

To check whether a vehicle has an MOT or road tax, visit: www.gov.uk/check-vehicle-tax