

## **The changing face of crime**

Crime, like all human activities, is constantly evolving. This means that the police and law-abiding citizens are always having to adapt in response.

During the past year, the occurrence of some types of crimes has risen, while others have fallen. In some cases, this is a result of behavioural trends wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic; while in others a range of other factors are at play, including police initiatives.

One type of crime on the increase across Surrey is the theft of catalytic converters from cars. Here, thieves take as little as 60 seconds to come to a halt, jack up the car on one side, saw off the catalyst and calmly drive away.

There is little that can be done to make the catalyst difficult to remove, so the best deterrent is to park your car such that it puts the thieves off from even trying. If you must park in the street, park in a well-lit and observable location and where it is difficult to get a jack under the side of the car. It is ultimately for the manufacturers to solve this problem. Toyotas and Hondas do seem to be targeted more than other makes.

Here in Woking, a spate of unsavoury incidents by the Basingstoke Canal has recently led to the creation of Canal Watch. This initiative involving the police, Woking Borough Council, Basingstoke Canal Society and Neighbourhood Watch is aimed at making the canal a safer place for everyone to use. The plan is for volunteers across the borough to make use of their regular walks along the canal to be the eyes and ears of the police and the Basingstoke Canal Authority, which owns and operates the canal. Volunteers will report anything suspicious, as well as problems such as excess litter, graffiti, and where repairs and maintenance are needed.

As part of the scheme's introduction, some improvements have already been made to the shrubbery along the canal's length to remove blind spots and potential hiding places. The volunteers will be visible to everyone with bright tabards making them stand out.

Overall, it is good to hear that reported crime in Woking has reduced by 14% over the last three months, according to Inspector Dave Bentley. The effect of lockdown is reflected in the detailed numbers – thefts down by 32%, residential burglary down by 25.3%, criminal damage down by 20%, robbery down by 17%, and hate crime down by 8%.

But lockdown appears to have benefited other crimes, with drug offences up by 20.7% and domestic violence up by 7.3%. Anti-social behaviour (ASB) has also risen by 33%, although it should be noted that this includes breaches of coronavirus regulations. The average increase in ASB for Surrey during this period was 45%.

Remember, if you see actual or potential criminal activity report it immediately via 101, which can be accessed via phone, web and social media. Ring 999 if it requires an immediate response. Do not assume that someone else has reported it. The more reports the police receive about an incident, the more prominent it becomes in the daily list of reported crimes. Report, report, report!

Times change and the crimes will too. But if we all continue to play a role reporting crimes or suspicious activity to the police, we will be in a better place whatever may come.