In the Loop

Hertfordshire Constabulary Stakeholder Newsletter

JULY 2008

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Introduction

Welcome to In the Loop – your regular update on news from your Constabulary.

In this issue you will find a range of items including details of some excellent new legal support for domestic violence victims in the county.

I'm also pleased that latest crime figures show that overall crime continues to fall in the county and this is a trend we wish to see continuing throughout the coming year.

I hope you find this edition helpful - please use the feedback details at the end of this bulletin if you have any suggestions or comments to make.

Frank Whiteley
Chief Constable

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Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Major Crime Unit

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NEW MAJOR CRIME UNIT UP TO STANDARD

"A groundbreaking initiative" is how Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies described the new joint Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Major Crime Unit (BHMCU) in its inspection report published in July.

The inspection examined both Bedfordshire Police's and Hertfordshire Constabulary's capacity and capability to identify and assess the risks from major crime. It also looked at their ability to prevent and investigate these crimes and how they prioritised those which pose the greatest threat to individuals or communities.

Detective Superintendent Andy Shrives, Head of the Unit said: "Since its creation in November 2007 the joint unit – the first of its kind in the country - has had considerable success investigating major crime. The unit has achieved a 100% detection rate for offences of murder, as well as supporting work which has led to significant reductions in offences of violent crime."

Hertfordshire's Assistant Chief Constable Heather Valentine said: "This report highlights a significant number of strengths in respect of our approach to major crime. Many of those strengths have developed over the course of the past couple of years and have been further refined as we have joined with Bedfordshire in the creation of the new Major Crime Unit. This team has consistently shown over the past eight months, that they can produce outstanding results both in terms of detecting and arresting offenders as well as providing a high quality of service to victims of crime and their families at a critical time. I am very pleased with the outcome of this report which is a testament to considerable commitment and hard work from those officers and staff on the new unit, as well as those colleagues within other parts of Hertfordshire Constabulary's Crime Management Department."

Yasmin Batliwala, Chair of Hertfordshire Police Authority said: "This report underlines the excellent progress made to date and we are keen to maintain the momentum. The Police Authority will continue to encourage and support all collaborative initiatives that deliver real improvements to the police services provided for the people of Hertfordshire."

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National Centre for Domestic Violence

FREE LEGAL ADVICE SERVICE LAUNCH FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS

Domestic abuse victims are being thrown a legal lifeline in the form of a brand new free 24:7 service from local solicitors. It was launched in July in collaboration with the National Centre for Domestic Violence (NCDV). Through the service, victims of domestic abuse are put directly in touch with a solicitor who can help provide fast, free advice and support on a range of legal services, such as accessing rights to children; housing and financial matters; and obtaining injunctions against perpetrators.

Steve Connor, Chairman of NCDV, said: "Domestic abuse is a cowardly and horrific crime that affects all sectors of society. I'm confident that by standing together in Hertfordshire we will send out a message that this crime will not be tolerated. The new service will empower victims to take control from the first time they seek help"

Efforts to manage domestic violence in Hertfordshire are being co-ordinated by the Domestic Violence Programme Board, which is chaired by Assistant Chief Constable Heather Valentine. She said: "Currently in Hertfordshire, domestic violence accounts for 22 per cent of all violent crime and we are committed to providing better services for victims and their affected families. It is hoped that through this new fast and effective service, more victims will be encouraged to come forward."

Detective Superintendent Jon Chapman, the Constabulary's champion in protecting vulnerable people, said: "We are delighted that NCDV are now extending their services to Hertfordshire, as we are committed to making the county a safer place for everyone. The legal advice offered through the new service is provided free of charge through legal aid. This new infrastructure and support increases the safety of victims and their families; and ultimately gives them the chance to take back control of their lives,"

Victims of abuse can get help 24 hour help, 365 days of the year by calling: 08709 220704 or free phone: 0844 80 44 999. Help and advice can also be accessed by sending NCDV in a text message to: 60777.

The service is launched just a few weeks after the first dedicated domestic violence court was started at Dacorum Magistrates, and plans are already underway to provide a similar service at Central Magistrates within the next few months. As part of the implementation plans, magistrates, courts staff and crown prosecutors were given domestic violence awareness training and the victims themselves are given improved support and guidance during the court process and beyond. Instrumental in providing the support are the Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) who are now working in the Western and Central areas. Plans to introduce IDVAs in the Eastern Area of the county are also being worked upon.

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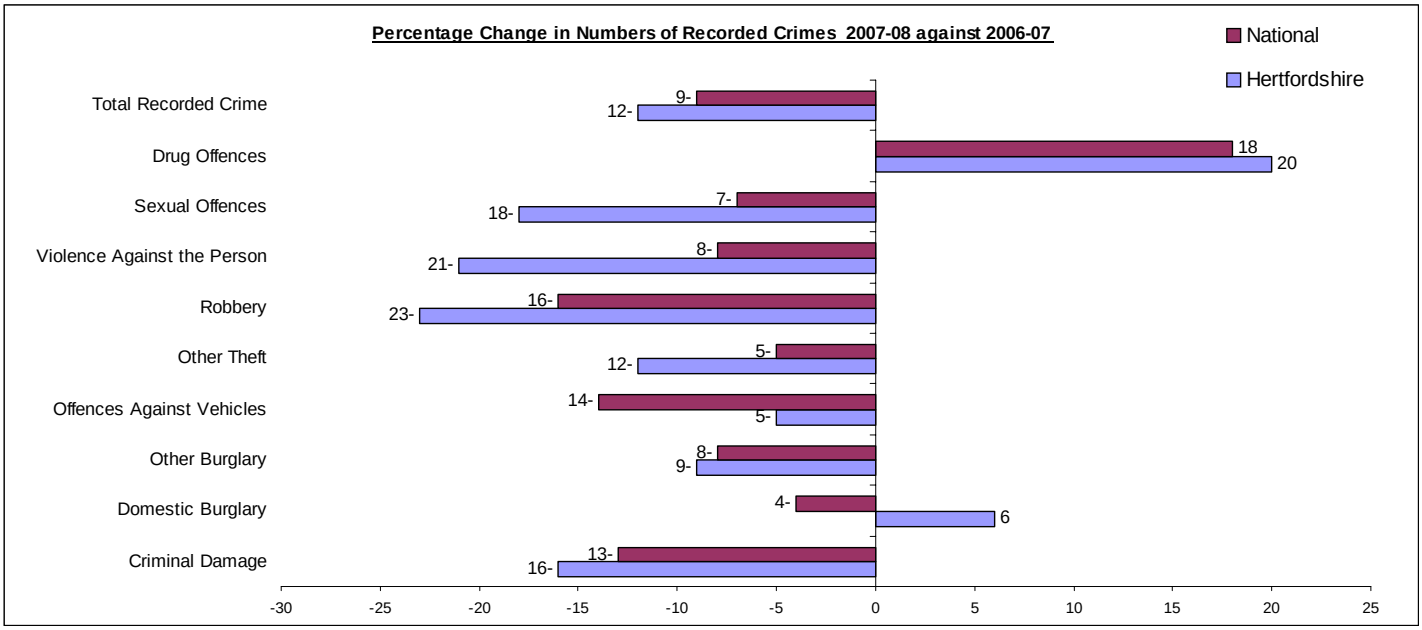
HERTFORDSHIRE CRIME LEVELS FALLING

National crime statistics released in July show that overall recorded crime between April 2007 and March 2008 fell further in Hertfordshire than nationally compared with the previous year. For the twelve month period, overall recorded crime in Hertfordshire fell by 12%, violent crime by 21% and robbery by 23%. Rates of crime in the county compared to the national picture also remained low across main crime types and Hertfordshire's overall crime detection rate rose to 30% compared to the national average of 28%.

Yasmin Batliwala, Chair of Herts Police Authority said: "These are very encouraging figures, particularly as they build on falling crime figures over a number of years. Overall crime, violent crime, robbery and sexual offences have seen significant drops compared to the national figures."

Chief Constable Frank Whiteley said: " These figures mean that there are fewer victims of crime in the county and that criminals are more likely to be caught and punished for the crimes they commit. The results reflect the excellent work being carried out by the officers and staff of Hertfordshire Constabulary alongside our local partners. Hertfordshire is a safe county in which overall crime is continuing to fall."

The one cause for concern was that whilst overall burglary fell by 2%, the burglary of dwellings, after falling to its lowest ever level in 2006/2007 rose by 5.6% in 2007/8. Major operations, often in partnership with neighbouring forces as many criminals travel into the county to commit crime, have been held to tackle this issue. Since April 2008 the Constabulary has more than doubled the number of offenders caught and brought to justice for burglary and it remains a priority for the Constabulary. The higher than average crime figures for drug offences reflect the robust attitude that Hertfordshire has to tackling drug trafficking in the county and largely reflect police initiated action. Knife crime does not feature as a problem in Hertfordshire. The Home Office statistics list 222 knife and sharp instrument serious offences in Hertfordshire for 2007/8, compared, for example, to 7,428 in the London Region and 22,151 nationally.



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SAFER NEIGHBOURHOODS

Working together for a safer Hertfordshire

HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY

SIX STEPS TO SUMMER SAFETY

Now that school is officially out for summer, Hertfordshire Constabulary is keen to ensure that over the coming weeks young people enjoy their free time whilst staying safe and keeping out of trouble.

Neighbourhood teams across the county will be stepping up patrols during the school holidays and information is being distributed to young people via summer schemes and camps to advise them about issues such as road safety, stranger danger, personal safety and using the internet wisely.

Detective Superintendent Mark Drew from the county's Community Safety and Crime Reduction Department, said: "Most young people are sensible throughout the summer period. We want to ensure that they enjoy their summer holidays safely and responsibly, and would advise parents to pass the following six summer safety tips on to their children."

1. Robbery and Street Crime

Although Hertfordshire has very low levels of crime, with robbery dropping by 23% last year, there are always ways to stay even safer. Research shows that most commonly, offenders and victims of robbery and street crime are 13 to 24 years old, so here are some ways to help reduce the chances of them losing their valuables when out and about:

- Keep wallets, purses, mobile phones, MP3 players and any other valuables out of sight
- Don't use or show off your mobile phone or MP3 player where it could be easily snatched
- Don't carry large amounts of cash
- Don't wear a lot of jewellery
- When walking around after dusk, stay in well lit areas and try to stick with friends or take a registered taxi

Mark said: "Although it is extremely unlikely that victims of robbery are physically hurt, they are often very shaken and upset and face the inconvenience of losing valuable possessions. Anyone found to be committing this kind of crime in Hertfordshire will face very serious penalties. If you have any information on a robbery, please contact us on 0845 33 00 222 or call Crimestoppers anonymously on: 0800 555111."

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2. Safety on the Internet

It is more important than ever to be web wise during the summer with young people having more free time to surf during the holidays. As it is so easy to remain anonymous on the web, this can encourage some people to make up things about themselves, even passing off someone else's face as their own. Young people need to be extra vigilant so they are not lulled into a false sense of security with someone they meet in a chat room who may have ulterior motives.

The following points should help you to prevent this happening:

- Don't give out personal details, photographs or any other information that could be used to identify you, such as information about your family, where you live or your school
- Don't take other people at face value - they may not be what they seem
- Never arrange to meet someone you've only ever previously met on the internet without first telling your parents, getting their permission and taking a responsible adult with you. The first meeting should always be in a public place
- Always stay in public areas for chatting
- Don't open an attachment or download a file unless you know and trust the person who has sent it

3. Road Safety

Traffic is the biggest single killer of 12-16 year olds, and national statistics show that teenagers are twice as likely to be knocked down and injured on our roads as toddlers.

One in two teenagers know someone their own age who has been injured on a road, most often because they were distracted – on the phone, sending a text, listening to music – and not paying attention.

These simple road safety messages can help keep teenagers safe:

- Concentrate and be careful at all times when out and about, and pay attention when near and crossing a road
- Be aware of the dangers of distractions. Using MP3 players, the phone or sending a text are all big distractions
- When cycling always wear a helmet, use cycle lanes where provided, and make sure you lock up your bike properly - even if you are just popping into a shop
- At night be safe – wear reflective clothing and use lights
- Most mini-motos are not designed for use on the road, and there is strict legislation surrounding their use – they must not be ridden on the road unless you are aged 16 or over and have a valid license, can prove ownership and supply a full MOT, insurance and tax details and wear a helmet. Even if not using them on the road, they must be used in designated areas or on private land with the landowner's permission - anti-social behaviour is associated with these vehicles when they are ridden on local roads, footpaths, parks and woodlands. Always make sure your child wears appropriate clothing and helmet. Remember, whilst some mini-motos are well-made, others can be of poor quality and require a high-level of maintenance to keep in a sound condition.

4. Stranger Danger

It is very rare for children to be abducted by strangers. However, it is worth parents and guardians reminding their children what to do if they are approached by a stranger with the following 'common-sense' advice:

- If you are not with a parent, teacher, or other adult who is looking after you, don't talk to strangers and never go off with anyone you don't know, no matter how friendly they appear to be
- If you are approached, walk away to somewhere you know is safe or to a busy place and tell someone you know and trust what has happened
- If you are going out alone or with friends always tell someone responsible for you where you are going and what time you'll be home and if your plans change, let them know
- Don't accept sweets, ice cream or anything else from anyone without asking someone, such as your parent or guardian, first. Just say 'no'
- If a grown up asks for your help, for example for directions, looking for a puppy or minding a car - don't. It's not rude to say no it's just being safe
- Parents should remind their children that if they are scared or troubled by anything that happens to them they should call the police on 999 for free and someone will come and help
- Adults should also be aware that approaches to children might make them feel uneasy

It is more likely for a child to be abused by someone they know, so if you find yourself in this situation – don't stay quiet. There is help and advice available that won't get you into trouble, call Childline on: 0800 1111 or the NSPCC Child Protection Helpline on: 0800 800 5000.

5. Trespass and Damage

Police are warning youngsters who trespass or cause criminal damage that they could be prosecuted. As part of School Watch, officers and PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) will be increasing their patrols around empty schools during the holidays to deter trespassers, vandals and burglars. Remember, it could be dangerous - you don't know if maintenance work is being done or who could be there.

6. Anti-Social Behaviour

Anti-social behaviour can include the following types of behaviour:

- Bad language
- Intimidation or threatening behaviour, for example, if you are part of a group that hang around outside of the corner shop and make people feel uncomfortable as they walk past
- Aggression towards an individual or group of people
- Tagging or graffiti
- Damaging property

"Hertfordshire is a safe place to live, with recent crimes figures showing a 12 per cent drop overall across the county," concluded Mark. "I hope this advice can help young people enjoy the summer months safely." For further information about keeping safe, visit Hertfordshire Constabulary's dedicated pages for young people at: http://www.herts.police.uk/basestation/

Feedback

If you have any comments on information you would like to see on future bulletins please contact police.bulletins@herts.pnn.police.uk.

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