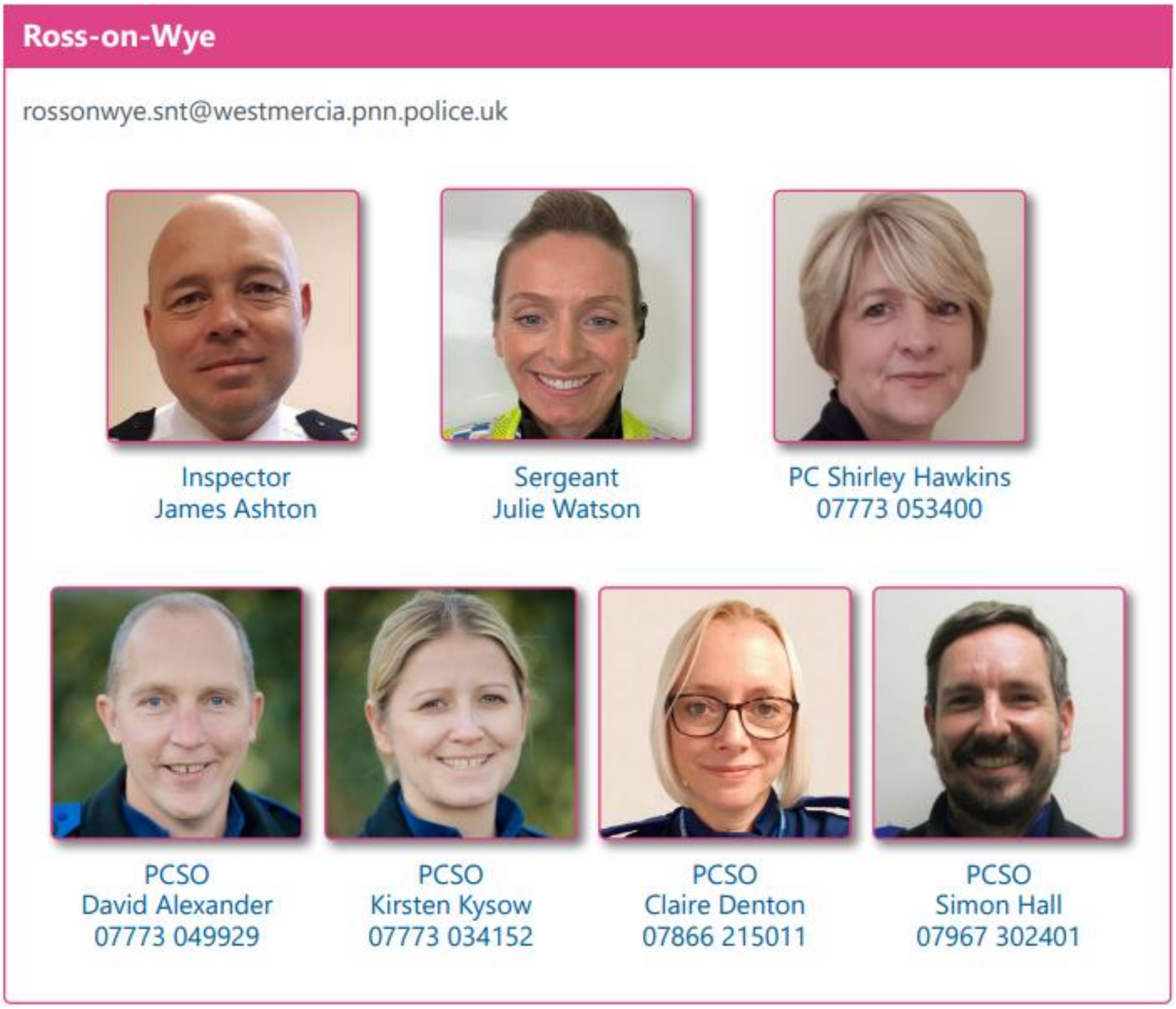
WALFORD PARISH COUNCIL
Police Liaison Co-Ordinator

NOVEMBER 2022 REPORT

1. SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM (SNT)

A. MEET YOUR SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM



Please note that **David Alexander** is our point of contact for **Ross-on-Wye SNT**

To report a crime in progress call **999** and for non-emergencies, report online at **www.westmercia.police.uk/report** If you are unable to report online, you can contact us via the **101** non-emergency number.

2. INITIATIVE & CAMPAIGNS

A. NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH CYBERCRIME SURVEY

Together with their Cyberhood Watch partner, Avast, Neighbourhood Watch have launched their annual Cybercrime Survey to understand the impact of cybercrime on communities across England and Wales today. The survey findings will help inform their work on addressing cybercrime. The survey takes around 5 minutes to complete. All answers are anonymous, and it will close on Sunday the 20th of November 2022.

At the end of the survey, you will have the option to enter into a prize draw for £50 of Marks and Spencer vouchers. If you'd like to take part, please go to: https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/G223G2K

B. MEET THE SAFER NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM (SNT)

On Wednesday 2nd November 2022 at 2 pm, members of the Ross SNT met with members of the public at Caffe Eleganza in Ross on Wye to discuss local concerns.

C. NATIONAL SPEED ENFORCEMENT OPERATION

During October West Mercia Police initiated a national speed enforcement. The operation was run across the UK and co-ordinated by NPCC, the National Police Chiefs' Council, to improve road safety and law enforcement and was run in 3 phases;

In phase one (from Monday 10 October to Sunday 16 October) forces shared messages across social media and other platforms encouraging drivers and riders to choose speeds that are both legal and safe, as well as conducting routine speed enforcement activity.

Phase two (from Monday 17 October to Sunday 30 October) forces ramped up higher-profile speed enforcement activity, focussing on roads and areas where speeding is known to be an issue or there is a history of serious collisions. The first week also coincided with the national Project EDWARD initiative (Every Day Without A Road Death) which highlighted road safety good practice across the UK with a public event at Southwater, Telford shopping centre on Monday 17th October.

Phase three (Wednesday 19 October) was National Safe Speed Day, with particular encouragement for drivers to think about the speeds they use, to reflect on why they may exceed speed limits and to commit to making all their road journeys at speeds that are both legal and safe for the conditions at the time.

Speeding, as well as inappropriate speed can have a devastating impact on the safety of road users, increasing the risk of a collision and the severity of the consequences. Over the past 3 years in West Mercia 127 people have been killed and 1363 seriously injured in collisions where speeding or inappropriate use of speed is noted as a contributory factor.

D. NATIONAL ACTION (COUNTY LINES)

During a week of co-ordinated national action targeting county lines drug dealing, over 30 people were arrested across the West Mercia area in October. 'County Lines' is the name given to the process and operation of drugs transported from predominately larger urban areas to smaller towns, often in rural areas, with the 'line' referring to the mobile number used to order the drugs. The competition between rival gangs also sees innocent people caught up in the challenge for control of the drug dealing.

Between the 3rd and 9th October officers from across West Mercia Police supported the National Crime Agency's County Lines Intensification Week, which saw 38 people arrested and a number of warrants carried out at residential properties.

Drugs with an estimated street value of more than £7,000 were seized during the week with a number of weapons such as knives, machetes, batons and vehicles seized, along with 36 mobile phones. More than £15,000 in cash was also recovered by officers during the week of intelligence led intensified activity.

County lines drug dealers often exploit children and young people, recruiting them to run drugs and cash between urban and county locations and to deal drugs on their behalf. Once recruited into county lines it can be difficult for those being exploited to leave, with fear and threats of violence used to keep them in place.

E. MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD ON POLICING ISSUES INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUPS (IAG)

Do you want to:

- Live in a safer community?
- Help to police your neighbourhood better?
- Advise on police operations and strategy?
- Share your experience and expertise to help build trust with diverse communities?
- Work with people from a wide range of backgrounds, lifestyles, cultures, ages and interests?

If you can answer yes to any or all of these questions, then West Mercia's Independent Advisory Groups need you.

The IAGs and their members are here to:

- Provide advice to the police about a wide range of issues, telling them what effect policing is having on different people in the community. This is particularly important regarding hate crime and when there's a major incident which may be of particular concern for certain groups in our communities.
- Look at policing policies and practices, pointing out any issues or unforeseen impacts of these, giving their views on whether these are working well and making suggestions for change or improvement, particularly in relation to fairness and inclusion.
- Examine reports about police powers (such as use of force) to make sure that they are using these in a fair, transparent and proportionate way. This helps to improve practice and to build mutual understanding, confidence and good relationships with all our diverse communities.

IAGs have been vital in providing advice and guidance to the police in many areas, including:

- Critical and major incidents
- Community relations and engagement
- Use of firearms and Tasers

- Equality and diversity issues
- Stop and search
- Hate
- crime
- Disability access
- Community activities

Join us:

The Independent Advisory Groups are now recruiting people like you to help shape and impact local policing. You are welcome to join as many of the themed groups as you feel is appropriate, and/or the local IAG group where you work, live or support somebody. And of course, bring your understanding of diversity issues to all topics discussed at any IAG.

If you would like to join, all we ask is that you have an interest in policing, can volunteer for a few hours every couple of months and would like to share your opinions on policing and community matters. You also need to be open to the views of others and be committed to fairness and respect for difference.

To join the IAG or find out more, contact:

Adrian Symonds, adrian.symonds@westmercia.pnn.police.uk, 07920 587732

F. STEER CLEAR

The Steer Clear programme that educates young people on the dangers of knife-crime has now been being extended into Herefordshire.

3. FRAUD UPDATES

The West Mercia Police Economic Crime Unit has provided the following Fraud updates this period:

A. HMRC

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR

Scammers may text or email people to tell them they are due a Tax Rebate from HMRC; this may also include a link that asks for personal details which can be used for further scams Scammers are also using phone calls to gain people's details Automated phone calls may be used to say people owe tax, and arrest warrants may be issued by HMRC unless they pay the outstanding tax Fake web pages have also been used which can copy the genuine HMRC website.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Before you give out any personal details first consider:

- Were you expecting to be contacted? Check it is HMRC really contacting you.

- Are you being pressured? If the request is for an urgent money transfer or for personal details be very wary.
- Are you being threatened with arrest? HMRC will never call you and threaten arrest
- Is it sounding too good to be true? Are you really expecting a Tax rebate?
- Is the website or email address genuine? Always double check these details if you are unsure. Some more refined scams may use official details and logos so be aware.
- Check your personal tax account online to see if there are any genuine messages.
- If you think it is a scam, report it to HMRC as soon as possible for further investigations.

B. FESTIVE SHOPPING

As consumers search online for bargains and gifts for loved ones, fraudsters are seeing this as an opportunity to trick people with the promise of great deals and big cash savings, so be aware of those ”Too good to be true” offers.

Do not get caught out this Christmas, and help protect yourself using the following guidelines:

- If something seems too much of a bargain, it’s probably poor quality, fake or doesn’t exist.
- Don’t pay for goods or services by bank transfer unless you know and trust the person. Payments via bank transfer offer you no protection if you become a victim of fraud. Use a protected payment method such as a credit card.
- Make sure you’ve installed the latest software & app updates. Criminals use weaknesses in software to attack your devices and steal information, such as your payment details.
- Use a strong, separate password and 2-step verification to protect your email account. Criminals can use your email to access other online accounts, such as those you use for online shopping.
- Don’t click on any link in an unexpected email or text. The volume of online shopping related phishing emails increases during the holiday period. Remember, if a deal seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Always double check website addresses to make sure they are genuine, and beware of bargain sales offers on social media platforms.
- Every Report Matters – if you have been a victim of fraud, report it to Action Fraud online or by calling 0300 123 2040.

C. POSTCODE LOTTERY

There have been reports of scam emails purporting to come from the Postcode Lottery and stating you have won in the draw. They will then ask for authentication by requesting personal details and even photographs, and they use a fake email address. The simple way to check if you have won a prize in a current or past draw is to visit the genuine Postcode lottery website and enter your postcode.

D. MOTORISTS URGED TO BE VIGILANT FOLLOWING SPATE OF CATALYTIC CONVERTER THEFTS

West Mercia Police are urging motorists across West Mercia to be vigilant following several catalytic converter thefts in Worcestershire and Shropshire on (Thursday 27 October). While the Police are working hard to prevent such crimes and will continue their investigations to find those responsible, there are some simple steps motorists can take to try and reduce the chance of their vehicle being targeted by thieves.

If you do notice any suspicious activity where individuals are pulling up next to cars and interfering with a vehicle, we would ask you to get in touch with us as soon as possible. It can take a thief less than three minutes to remove a catalytic converter from its housing on the car exhaust pipe but below are a number of ways the public can protect their property and their vehicle:

- Keep your vehicle in a garage if you can;
- If you park it on a driveway, install motion activated lighting
- Otherwise, park in a well-lit, populated area.
- Locks are also available that can be fitted to your converter You should also register your converter and mark it with a forensic marker, which will make it harder for thieves to dispose of.

For more prevention advice, visit their website (https://www.westmercia.police.uk/cp/crime-prevention/keeping-vehicles-safe/catalytic-converter-theft/) and you can also Visit Secured by Design (https://www.securedbydesign.com/) or Sold Secure Gold (https://www.soldsecure.com/) for more details.

E. PENSIONS SCAMS

Scammers will make false claims to gain your trust. For example:

Claiming they are authorised by the FCA or that they don’t have to be FCA authorised because they aren’t providing the advice themselves claiming to be acting on the behalf of the FCA or the government service Pension Wise

Scammers design attractive offers to persuade you to transfer your pension pot to them (or to release funds from it). It is then often invested in unusual and high-risk investments like overseas property, renewable energy bonds, forestry, storage units, or simply stolen outright.

Scam offers often include:

Free pension reviews higher returns – guarantees they can get you better returns on your pension savings help to release cash from your pension even though you’re under 55 (an offer to release funds before age 55 is highly likely to be a scam) high-pressure sales tactics – the scammers may try to pressure you with ‘time-limited offers’ or even send a courier to your door to wait while you sign documents unusual investments – which tend to be unregulated and high risk, and may be difficult to sell if you need access to your money complicated structures where it isn’t clear where your money will end up arrangements where there are several parties involved (some of which may be based overseas) all taking a fee, which means that the total amount deducted from your pension is significant long-term pension investments – which mean it could be several years before you realise something is wrong

Remember:

- Always reject unexpected offers
- Check who you are dealing with – use the FCA Register
- Do not be rushed or pressured
- Seek impartial advice such as the Pensions Advisory Service

F. ROMANCE FRAUDS

This type of Fraud has been highlighted in past updates, however there have been several recent reports of scams which combine various aspects together including Romance, Celebrities and Ticket Fraud.

How does it work?

- A victim thinks they are getting in touch with a genuine Celebrity/Star/ Performer through a website or Social Media
- They then may be offered enhanced ticket packages for a Concert etc. including backstage access, post-performance, to meet the "Celebrity"
- The post may also include a genuine image of the named Celebrity but that will probably be the only genuine item in the post, email addresses and other contact details will all be false
- In some cases, the "Celebrity" has even offered some form of romance opportunity and states they want to meet up for a relationship, sometimes with a financial cost to the victim

Fraudsters are experts at impersonating people, famous or otherwise, so to protect yourself:

- Research the site and read any reviews
- Never click on any links in emails etc. but type in the genuine website address to your browser
- Be suspicious of any "Too good to be true" offers
- Finally always use a secure and protected payment method such a Credit Card, and check the seller is registered with "Society of Ticket Agents & Retailers (STAR)

What is Fraud and Cyber Crime?

- Fraud is when trickery is used to gain a dishonest advantage, which is often financial, over another person.
- Cyber Crime is any criminal act dealing with computers and networks.

G. INVESTMENT FRAUD

'Get rich quick' investment opportunities are soaring amongst young professionals, with more than £890 million lost to investment fraud last year. Criminals are evolving the way that they target people with bogus investment opportunities, with many victims now being targeted on social media.

The total amount lost to investment fraud in the 2021/22 financial year rose by a staggering 49.5 per cent on the previous period (£890,916,169 up from £596,053,731). New data from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) also shows there were 26,170 reports of investment fraud to Action Fraud in the same period, meaning victims lost an average of £34,043.41 each.

How to spot the signs and protect yourself

- Before deciding to invest, always do your research and do not let anyone rush you. Only criminals will put pressure on you to make a quick decision. Stop, take time to think and consult trusted friends and family members before parting with your money.
- Be cautious if you are asked to change money into cryptocurrency to invest or make a payment via cryptocurrency. This is often a tactic used by fraudsters.
- Be aware that some investment opportunity approaches can come via social media. Always undertake additional research to check the validity of such an opportunity.
- Fraudsters have been known to hack social media accounts to promote bogus investments. If you are making an investment based on a recommendation from a friend or family member sent via social media, check that this has actually been sent by them.
- Scammers will often create professional looking websites and utilise fake business premise locations to give an impression of legitimacy.

Never let anyone take control of your phone or computer for any reason. A reputable business would never do this. Check on the FCA website to see if an investment business is authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority.

H. ENERGY BILL SCAMS

A recent report from a potential victim of an Energy Bill Scam went as follows:

A call was received claiming to be from the person's Energy Company and asking for a meter reading, serial number, bank details and other personal details. Fortunately the person did not have the information to hand and rang back the Energy Company on the listed number, so in this case no money was lost.

Never provide financial or personal details over the phone unless you are 100% sure the caller is genuine, always use the listed telephone number on the invoice.

I. PREMIUM RATE TELEPHONE NUMBER SCAM

What is it?

Scammers will try to trap people trying to search the internet for Government Services and other providers. e.g., DVLC They will show an advert with the phone number of the service, or department that the person is looking for, and these may appear high on a search engine lists as an "Advert".

However this will come with a heavy charge as a Premium Rate Call, often up to £30 per call. Even if you do finally get through to the right department, you have paid an unwarranted high charge.

Remember, most of these Advice Lines should be free of charge.

What to watch out for.

- Always avoid using numbers prefixed with 084, 090, 091,or 098, no Government Department will use such numbers
- Take care when searching for such things as Car Tax and Driving Licence renewals, as well as HMRC enquiries and returns.

And finally, when looking for Government Department contact details, always us the official Government Services Website – GOV.UK

J. ENERGY BILL REBATE SCHEME

Several recent Warnings have been issued about possible scams as this scheme comes into play. However it worth remembering the following points about this Scheme to avoid being trapped by the Fraudster's texts and emails which are already circulating.

- Direct Debit customers will receive the Energy Bill discount automatically as a deduction to the monthly Direct Debit amount collected, or as a refund to the customer's bank account following Direct Debit collection during each month of delivery.
- Standard credit customers and payment card customers will see the Energy Bill discount automatically applied as a credit to standard credit customers' accounts in the first week of each month of EBSS delivery, with the credit appearing as it would if the customer had made a payment.
- Smart prepayment meter customers will see the Energy Bill discount credited directly to their smart prepayment meters in the first week of each month of delivery.
- Traditional prepayment meter customers will be provided with redeemable EBSS Energy Bill discount vouchers or Special Action Messages (SAMs) from the first week of each month, issued via SMS text, email or post. Customers will need to redeem these at their usual top-up point.
- Customers will NOT need to apply via any government link, website, rebate company, share-scheme; nor will they need to provide their bank account details or make contact with their energy supplier.

K. STUDENT FRAUD

The new start of an Academic year can be exciting times for all involved, however there can be areas where new students may be vulnerable to Scammers and Fraudsters.

1.HMRC Scams

In previous years Students taking part time jobs have been at increasing risk from fake messages claiming to be from HMRC, often offering tax refunds. Basically these are phishing messages to glean personal and financial details off the victim.

HMRC will only ever contact customers who are due a tax refund in writing by post. They do not use telephone calls, emails or external companies in these circumstances. Anyone who receives an email claiming to be from HMRC should send it to **phishing@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk** before deleting it permanently.

2.Student Loans

In previous years there have been phishing scams claiming to come from the Student Loans Company. They often target first year students and dupes them into handing over personal information to steal their identity and defraud them.

They often tell the victim their details are out of date or incomplete, and provide a link to a fake website where they can harvest their details.

If in doubt, contact the Loans Company direct using a listed number.

3.Money Mules

Be very cautious of unsolicited job offers or opportunities to make easy money. These Fraudsters will pretend to offer legitimate jobs or get rich quick schemes via emails and target vulnerable groups such as Students who may think this is an easy way to make money.

Basically the Fraudster recruits innocent people to transfer stolen money overseas using the victim's bank account, who will then be asked to transfer the money onward, perhaps being allowed to keep some money for themselves.

4.Rental Fraud.

Rental fraud happens when would-be tenants are tricked into paying an upfront fee to rent a property. In reality, the property does not exist, has already been rented out, or has been rented to multiple victims at the same time. The victim loses the upfront fee they have paid and is not able to rent the property they thought they had secured with the payment. Rental fraudsters often target students looking for university accommodation.

Protect yourself

Do not send money to anyone advertising rental properties online until you are certain the advertiser is genuine.

If you need to secure accommodation in the UK from overseas, seek the help of the employer or university you are coming to, or get a friend, contact or relative to check the property exists and is available. Do not pay any money until you or a reliable contact has visited the property with an agent or the landlord. Ask for copies of tenancy agreements and any safety certificates such as Gas Electricity or HMO Licence. Do not be pressurised into transferring large sums of money. Transfer funds to a bank account having obtained the details by contacting the landlord or agent directly after the above steps have been followed. Be sceptical if you're asked to transfer any money via a money transfer service like Western Union.

REPORTING A CRIME

If you have information about a crime but don't feel comfortable speaking to police, you can speak to the independent charity Crimestoppers. It is 100% anonymous, they never ask your name and they cannot trace your call or I.P address. You can contact them online at crimestoppers-uk.org or by calling 0800 555 111.

For crimes in progress always call 999. For non-emergencies you can report to us online at www.westmercia.police.uk/report

TAKE FIVE TO STOP FRAUD

Stop: Taking a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information could keep you safe.

Challenge: Could it be fake? It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.

Protect: If you think you've been a victim of fraud, contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud online at actionfraud.police.uk or by calling 0300 123 2040.

For further information visit: https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/ AND/OR https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/