Challenge & Prevent Retail Theft

A guide for retail staff



South Wales Police

Introduction

South Wales Police is committed to Crime Prevention, reducing recorded crime, and helping our residents and businesses enjoy a safer county.

However, it is a well-known fact that South Wales Police, along with every other police force in the UK, faces unprecedented financial challenges and also has to tackle emerging types of crime such as cybercrime, fraud and domestic abuse.

This does not mean that other more 'traditional' crime has gone away or should be ignored. In fact, within South Wales theft from shops equated to 10% of all recorded crime in the financial year 2017-2018, and has increased by 14% since 2015, which is significant. So as we adapt to the evolving picture of crime in our county, we must not lose focus from continuing to combat offences such as shop theft which blight our communities. We just need to be smarter and more efficient.

This is why we have developed our new "Challenge and Prevent" policy – to support retailers in protecting their assets, by employing simple but effective tactics to prevent and detect crime. In essence – Challenge Offenders, and Prevent Crime.

This guide provides information about how you and your employees can identify offenders and deter them from committing crime within your business, and provide us with the essential evidence we need to investigate a theft if it occurs. It also details how South Wales Police will investigate theft and deal with offenders, reassuring you that we remain committed to offering a high level of service to anyone who is a victim of crime in our county, regardless of whether they are an individual or a business.

OSCAR

As a retailer it is your choice who you allow into your premises, and who you serve. It is also your duty to take reasonable steps to prevent crime. But what defines “reasonable”, and how can your staff take steps without putting themselves at risk? We have put together the OSCAR principles to give you a guide.

The OSCAR principles of ‘Challenging and Preventing’ offenders are widely encouraged across South Wales and should be seen as a guiding principle for scheme members. Included at the rear of this guide is an OSCAR poster which you can display in staff areas to act as an aide memoire to staff.

Be OBSERVANT:

It is your job to look for anybody who is a potential harm to your business by stealing, being violent, being disruptive or damaging the premises or contents. Look for the tell-tale signs:

- Is it a large, loud group who seem to have no respect for anybody else?
- Are they looking round the shop for staff and/or security staff?
- Are they clearly not the usual clientele for your store?

Get SUSPICIOUS:

If you do see anybody whose behaviour fits the above list, or for any other reason not listed, do two things:

- Tell someone else in the store, either by radio or in person so that any necessary security measures can be put in place, or CCTV can be asked to watch.
- Keep watching the person, this will help you to decide that the person(s) are potentially about to commit an offence.

CHALLENGE them:

By challenging them, you let them know they have been seen, and the most likely outcome is that they will leave the store. Try the following to encourage them to leave the store of their own accord:

- Stand close enough so they can hear you and pass a message over the radio that you are not happy with their behaviour and are watching them.

- Walk up to them and ask 'Can I help you?' This is simple, non-confrontational, and what is expected in shops. If they choose to then become non-confrontational, your suspicions have been confirmed and you can put in process the methods your store uses to ask people to leave.

- Put out a message over the shop tannoy asking them (by name if you know it, or perhaps by description if not e.g. can the man in the red jacket in the razor section please come to the customer service desk). Again, they will know they have been seen but no-one has confronted them.

- Any other means of challenging them, without confronting them

ASK them to leave:

Every shop/premises has the common law right to require anybody to leave, and to refuse to serve anybody. By whatever process your store uses, if you feel someone is about to steal from you, ask them to leave the shop.

REPORT the incident:

Report ALL incidents such as this to the Shop or Business Watch Coordinator for your area (if applicable), not just where property is stolen, and this information is shared with South Wales Police. Even where a theft has been prevented, we can still use the CCTV footage and other information to prevent further incidents.

How we will deal with your report

South Wales Police assesses all calls for service on a number of factors, which we call **THRIVE** – **T**hreat, **R**isk, **H**arm, **I**nvestigation, **V**ulnerability, **E**ngagement. These allow us to ensure we respond in the appropriate time. For example, where you have detained an uncompliant thief and there is a risk to your staff or the public, we would grade this as Urgent. Where you have discovered a theft sometime after the event, we may record the crime details over the phone rather than send an officer. See the flowchart on page 8 for more information on how to report an incident. In instances where you have successfully prevented a theft from occurring, we would not record a crime but would use the information for intelligence purposes to allow us to prevent the same person committing further offences.

Where a crime has occurred, if there are lines of enquiry to follow this will be allocated to an officer to investigate. The officer will collect all available evidence and attempt to identify a suspect. If you provide us with CCTV footage we can use this to circulate pictures to local officers, or to the public via social media or local press. We will keep you updated at least every 28 days on the progress of our investigation. Where there are no investigation opportunities we will record a crime and file it. Where we identify an offender there are a number of ways we can deal with them if there is enough evidence, in the following order of severity:

Community Resolution – An informal but effective process where the offender makes amends for their actions, such as compensating the victim for their loss, apologising or accepting a ban from the store. Offenders can participate in a community resolution once, as a deterrent against further offences.

Penalty Notice for Disorder – This is a £90 fixed penalty notice that can be issued for thefts under £100, if the offender is not eligible for a community resolution.

Caution/Conditional Caution – Where the offender has no criminal record, they can receive a formal warning from police which does not amount to a conviction, but stays on police records for a specified period. This can be issued to adults or youths, and usually they only get one opportunity to receive a caution. In some circumstances conditions can be attached to it, such as paying compensation.

Summons – The offender will receive a court summons if they are not eligible for any of the above options, and will be dealt with at court.

Charge – Offenders who have been arrested are charged to appear at court, rather than summonsed.

Where possible, we will seek the victim's views on how the offender should be dealt with, based on the options they are eligible for. Where offenders do not need to be arrested we will usually deal with them in the store so the incident can be resolved swiftly.

What Evidence Do We Need From You?

As the police it is our responsibility to prove the defendant's guilt beyond all reasonable doubt. This means that we need a high standard of evidence to prove our case. Our officers will ask you for the following information:

Statements – Statements are written evidence from victims and witnesses detailing what happened. These are provided to the court to inform them what the witness or victim saw, or to formally present exhibits such as CCTV footage.

CCTV – If you have CCTV cameras in your store, we will ask for the footage on disc/USB/memory card to help us identify the offender. This should show the whole period from when they enter the store, allow us to track their movements in the store, and show them leaving. This evidence is crucial and we will ask for it on our first attendance, so please ensure you have staff available to produce footage immediately on reporting the incident.

Inventory – We will need to know what has been stolen, and the value of it. This could be in the form of a till receipt or a stock inventory. If you're unsure if anything has been stolen and cannot tell us what stock has been lost, it is unlikely we can prove a theft occurred.

The Evidential Package

To help us gain all the evidence we need to deal with the offender effectively, we will ask you to complete a Retail Theft Investigation Pack. This contains a statement for evidence and CCTV. We will ask for this on our first attendance, so please ensure it is completed fully as soon as you report the incident to us, to avoid any delay.

The package is designed to be easy to complete and contains guidance to help you fill it in. Please make sure you complete and sign every page of the statement and cross out any sections that do not apply. Our officers will be happy to advise if you need assistance completing it.

Crime Prevention Tips

Here are some other hints and tips for preventing crime and spotting potential offenders:

Staff Placement – Use your workforce wisely; they are your eyes and ears in the store. Consider placing staff at the front entrance advertising promotions or free samples, which will deter offenders from trying to leave with stolen goods. Perhaps allow a staff member to restock shelves in high risk areas such as alcohol aisles during the working day, to maintain a presence.

Vigilance – Encourage your staff to watch customers and keep an eye on activity at the front entrance. As staff make their way around the store during their duties, ask them to particularly walk through areas such as alcohol aisles and CCTV blackspots.

Point of Sale – Many point of sale displays at larger retailers are carefully set by head offices, deliberately placing attractive products near the entrance. Where you do have freedom to make changes, consider moving these items within sight of staff and further from the entrance where they cannot easily be taken by opportunist thieves.

Security – If your store employs security guards, ensure they are briefed to proactively prevent offences, rather than allow them to happen and try to challenge thieves as they leave. Your store will become less attractive to habitual offenders if they know they will be quickly identified and actively deterred.

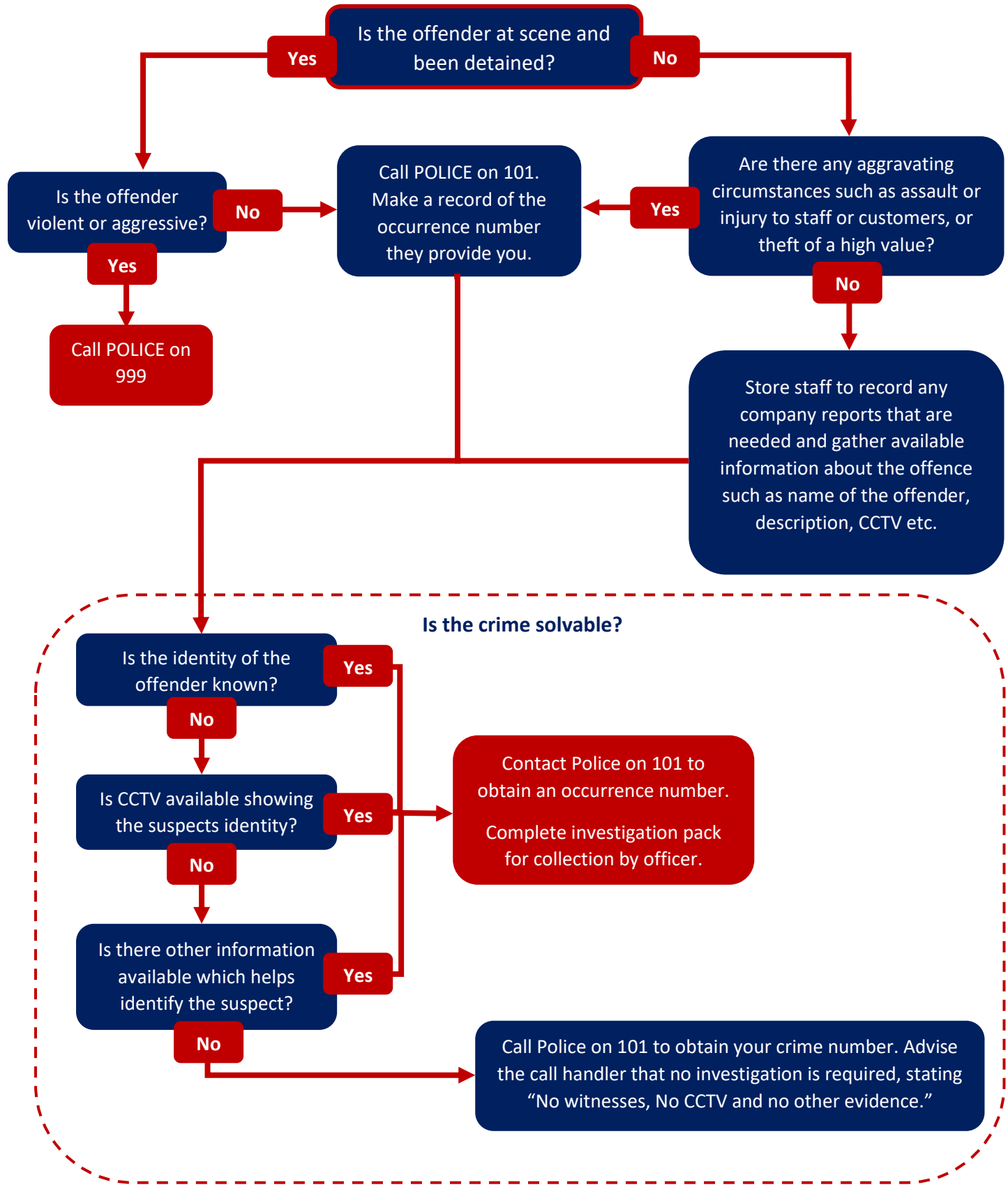
Banning – Where you successfully identify a potential shoplifter it is your right to ban them from the store. After an offender is banned they become a trespasser if they return, and if they go on to steal they may commit more serious offences which can be dealt with more severely.

CCTV – Check your CCTV system for any blackspots, which either aren't covered by cameras or are obstructed by point of sale displays, and take action to remedy this. Make sure you train a number of staff to operate the system and produce footage if requested by police.

Stock Checks – Frequent stock checks will quickly highlight products that are being stolen more often, and allow you to put extra security measures in place.

Shelves – Where particular products are often targeted, such as chewing gum or a particular alcohol brand, reduce the amount of stock on the shelves. Many thieves will want to clear the shelf, so if you can't prevent the theft, it's worth reducing the loss. Security tagging high risk items will also make them more of a challenge to steal, and vigilant staff will notice if security tags are being interfered with.

Crime investigation flowchart



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THINK CRIME PREVENTION

Retail staff can help prevent would be shoplifters from committing offences by following the principles of OSCAR

Observe - *What is going on in and around the store*

Suspicious behaviour— Inform others of suspicious behaviour and continue to watch

Challenge— Let offenders know you are watching them

Ask them to leave

Report— inform the police on 101 or 999 in an emergency

South Wales Police

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