

Police and Crown Office launch campaign to combat housebreaking



Police Scotland and the Crown Office today launched a national campaign to tackle housebreaking across the country.

Operation RAC will be implemented in various areas throughout Scotland to identify those responsible for break-ins and thefts and bring them to justice.

Since April 1st Police Scotland has provided dedicated resources to communities to tackle crimes of violence, sexual assaults and domestic abuse and as a result, greater numbers of these offences are being reported and solved.

During this time, the Force has observed an overall increase of around 4% in housebreaking, with a number of areas reporting greater levels of crime than the national average.

As part of Police Scotland's commitment to community engagement, housebreaking has been identified as a local priority for certain regions and these divisions will now be provided with additional resources and support to address the issue.

The operation will initially run within Edinburgh, Forth Valley, the Lothians and Scottish Borders, Fife, Highlands and Islands, Aberdeenshire and Moray, Aberdeen city and Lanarkshire.

In each location, dedicated policing teams have been created to exclusively investigate housebreakings within homes, outbuildings and businesses and apprehend the individuals responsible.

Housebreaking offences will continue to be monitored throughout Scotland and extra support can be provided to any area requiring a more robust response to tackle this issue.

Throughout Operation RAC, Police Scotland will work closely with partners at COPFS to ensure housebreakers are being appropriately dealt with and removed from communities where possible.

Assistant Chief Constable Wayne Mawson said: "Police Scotland remains committed to keeping people safe and I am delighted with the professionalism and dedication our officers have shown as part of our continued focus towards violence reduction.

"We recently launched our local policing campaign, which provides us with the opportunity to speak with individual communities and identify the issues or concerns specifically affecting their area.

"As a result, housebreaking has been highlighted as a priority for a number of our divisions and officers in these areas will be taking targeted action to detect anyone involved and deter further offences from occurring.

"We are keen to work not only with our partner agencies, but with our communities to address the issue of housebreaking and crime prevention advice for safeguarding your home, shed, outbuildings and businesses can be found on our website – www.scotland.police.uk

"I say this message directly to those intent on committing housebreakings in Scotland – if you engage in this invasive and distressing form of crime, we will use every resource at our disposal to remove you from our communities and ensure you spend time behind bars."

In conjunction, Solicitor General Lesley Thomson QC has announced a tough new prosecution policy to deal with

housebreakers.

From Monday 16 December 2013 until Monday 6 January 2014 those reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal service (COPFS) for being involved in housebreaking will be prosecuted under the new policy.

Housebreaking offences are normally prosecuted on summary complaint or indictment, with summary cases carrying a maximum sentence of 1 year imprisonment.

However, over the period of the initiative there will be a presumption that all cases involving a charge of theft by housebreaking, or housebreaking with intent to steal, or attempts of either of those offences, will be prosecuted on indictment.

This means that all accused of these crimes could face a higher penalty of up to five years imprisonment.

Ms Thomson QC said: "Housebreaking is a traumatic experience for anyone. Apart from suffering the loss of cherished possessions, it can often leave people afraid of being in their own homes, particularly the elderly or those who live alone.

"We know people can be away at this time of year and many have expensive items stored in their homes making them a target for a break in. The loss of presents which people have often saved all year to buy is particularly sickening for those involved."

Ms Thomson added: "We want to send out a strong deterrent message to housebreakers who cause misery for householders.

"I would also like to reassure the people of Scotland that housebreaking is something that we and the police take very seriously right across the country. The Crown Office and Police Scotland are working together to tackle housebreaking offences.