

Professional shoplifters targeted under Proceeds of Crime Act



The Solicitor General Lesley Thomson QC today revealed Serious Organised criminals are involved in professional shoplifting on an industrial scale and set out the measures the Crown Office is taking to outsmart them.

Specialist prosecutors have dismantled shoplifting crime groups over the last year by working closely with a dedicated police enquiry team and we will continue to focus our efforts on putting them out of business.

An alert system has been set up to allow us to monitor their activities more closely than ever before, and enable the co-ordination of the investigation and prosecution of cases at the earliest possible stage.

More than 200 people have been identified as being involved in organised shoplifting in this way.

Speaking after the publication of the latest POCA figures, Ms Thomson said: “Organised shoplifting has a huge impact on retailers and their paying customers.

“Crime groups tried turning to shoplifting thinking they could make an easy profit.

“The message to those who commit professional shoplifting could not be clearer: The Crown and the police know who you are and we are ensuring that retailers and customers are protected to the fullest extent of the law by using the latest technology to disrupt your activity.

“We are learning more and more about their tactics and are adapting to disrupt them. We not only pursue convictions, but also their assets, with the aim of depriving them of the lifestyle to which they have become accustomed.

“We have shown time and again that no matter the nature or scale of the crime, no matter how well an accused thinks they have sheltered themselves from the reach of the law, we will detect them, we will bring them to justice and we will begin the work of dismantling their criminal networks in any form they take.”

Lindsey Miller, Procurator Fiscal for Organised Crime and Counter-Terrorism, added: “Just as legitimate companies need income to survive, so do serious organised crime enterprises – and we are putting more and more of them out of business.

“We will continue to use a whole host of measures, from prosecution, to confiscation of illegal earnings, to civil recovery actions, to the imposition of Financial Reporting Orders, to securing compensation for victims, to ensure that organised criminals do not keep their illegal earnings.

“We will also work with businesses, licensors and local authorities to ensure that as many means of funding for these groups as possible are cut off.”

Justice Secretary Michael Matheson added: “This Government is committed to tackling the issue of serious organised crime head-on, and the tough actions of our law enforcement agencies means Scotland is getting ever more sophisticated at detecting and preventing criminal activity.

“We are continuously looking at ways to improve efforts to seize criminal assets through the unique partnership working of the Serious Organised Crime Taskforce, and we will maximise the use of all tools available to outsmart organised criminals wherever they operate.

“Ultimately, this innovative way of working across Scotland’s law enforcement and other agencies means we’re making Scotland an ever more hostile place for criminals and showing them in the strongest terms that crime just doesn’t pay.”

Maxine Fraser, National Operations Director for Retailers Against Crime, said:“The impact of Retail Crime on the economy has been underestimated; with store closures and redundancies, the effect of retail crime is much more than the actual items stolen or the monetary value. The impact on staff recruitment & retention and the fear of crime are major factors for retailers and their ability to trade profitably.

“Professional criminals who steal to order and use sophisticated methods to dispose of their gains commit a significant proportion of crime reported to RAC. Many have links to organised crime and are frequently involved in other criminal activities including drugs, firearms and fraud. Mostly operating in teams of up to 20, these offenders travel throughout the UK and internationally committing crime which funds their lavish lifestyles.

“Although the majority of sentences handed down to those convicted of retail crime are minimal, recent successful proceeds of crime cases against those linked to organised crime are welcome news to retailers.

“With retailers working closely with the police and the Crown Office, more individuals may be targeted for proceeds of crime in the future.”

Assistant Chief Constable Ruairaidh Nicolson of Police Scotland added:“365 days a year, Police Scotland has over 17,000 officers who work tirelessly to identify the assets of those who want to profit from the misery and harm they cause in communities across Scotland. The joint work with the COPFS and other partners at The Scottish Crime Campus ensures that can make Scotland is a hostile place for criminals to operate in”.

David Martin, the Deter lead on the Scottish Government's Serious Organised Crime Taskforce said: "It is only by working together that we can outsmart Serious Organised Crime.

"Systems like the shoplifting alert can help police and prosecutors to protect businesses and the public from organised shoplifting, but we all have a powerful role to play.

"I would urge the public to report anything they see which is suspicious, and ensure they don't help fund serious organised crime by buying goods which don't come from a legitimate source."