

East Lothian houses targeted by young travelling criminals say police

The number of homes broken into in East Lothian nearly doubled last year as gangs of young thieves travelled to the county on the hunt for expensive cars and jewellery.

A police report has revealed that between April last year and March this year 163 houses were targeted, a rise of 94 per cent on the five year average.

Chief Inspector Ben Leathes, local area commander, told a meeting of East Lothian Council's Police, Fire and Community Safety committee, offenders behind the increase were travelling to East Lothian from outside the county with one thief traced as far as Dundee.

He told the meeting: "Offenders are coming into East Lothian, not people who reside in the county and that raises its own challenges. It has changed over the last 10 years when offenders would have been local.

"We have good working relationships with neighbouring divisions and those further afield."

His report added that overall break ins had risen by 14 per cent in the last year, compared to the five year average but had been driven up by the increase in homes being targeted.

He said: "This sizeable increase is primarily driven by

offenders in their late teens and early 20s who are often not resident in East Lothian and have targeted domestic houses to steal high value cars and more recently jewellery.”

Chief Inspector Leathes said in recent weeks there had been a dip in the number of homes being broken into in East Lothian but warned that this was likely to be because some offenders were currently in jail.

He said: “There are a number of offenders who see this as a means of making money and as soon as they come out of prison they start again.”

His report said: “Participation in the neighbourhood watch scheme is encouraged and something we would ideally like to see more of as this allows real time alerts to be issued in relevant areas.

“We are continuing to promote the alerts system to have more communities signed up and are participating in a Quad Bike alert scheme which was initially piloted in Midlothian and again alerts those registered to real time criminal activity in their neighbourhood.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter