Dear Parent or Guardian,

Please can you help us to help you?

This time last year I wrote to you as there had been a significant increase in robberies across London where the victims were of school going age. I am really pleased and proud to be able to report that we have made significant reductions in reported crime over the last twelve months. Merton borough has recorded outstanding reductions, more than anywhere else in London in both robbery and burglary offences. We are also shown as the top borough in relationship to trust with the public. This is testimony to the relationships we have fostered with all our external partners and you the public we serve. I want to thank you all for the guidance and advice you have shared with the children under your care, as without this I have no doubt we would not have achieved such amazing results.

The South West police command area remains as the safest of all London Boroughs, however we must still remain vigilant and as such I would like to remind you of some ways in which you can continue to help. I would like to focus on robberies as this is an area we can all help with. The peak times that robberies occur are between 3pm-5pm (during term time) which obviously correlates directly to school leaving times.

So here is where you can help!

Your local police are currently taking many active steps to prevent any further robberies and bring offenders to justice. Some of these tactics you may notice, such as increased after school patrols in specific crime hot spots, more engagement with our local communities, researching and looking to find safer routes from school to transport hubs. Other may not be quite so obvious, such as plain clothed police officers patrolling in unmarked marked vehicles and an increased use of covert CCTV. We are also working closely with second hand shops, phone unlocking services and similar outlets where historically offenders have targeted to sell on stolen items. In addition our Safer School Officers are working directly with the schools giving presentations on various topics tailored to each year group, including Personal Safety. They also conduct follow up visits at school with any victims of robbery.

There are some simple steps children can take to make themselves less vulnerable to crime. One of the most effective methods is as easy as just keeping desirable property out of view when on the streets and to always remain vigilant. The wearing of earphones/buds and looking at mobile phones sadly causes two issues. Firstly it can distract the wearer from what's going on around them, but secondly it highlights they are likely to have high value items which are easy to steal and easy to sell. Please ensure that your child/children stick to routes that are busy, endeavour to stay with groups of trusted friends, choose a route that has good street lighting and ideally with local shops, if possible use a route that is covered by CCTV. Remind them that the short cut down the dark alley may well save 5 minutes, but it is not worth the additional risk. Empower and reassure them that if they feel uneasy or threatened in any way to go into a shop or approach an adult and ask them to phone police.

However most importantly of all make sure that they understand that if they are threatened for their property to simply hand it over. It is far better to lose personal possessions than to be injured trying to keep them.

Be aware of your surroundings

- If you need to call or use your phone on the street, look out for anyone on a bike or a moped near you. Look up, look out
- Make it quick so you don't become distracted

- Don't text while you're walking – you won't notice what's going on around you
- If that's not possible, stand away from the roadside, close to a building or wall, so no one can come up behind you
- Going hands-free can prevent a thief from snatching your phone out of your hand

Use security features on your phone

- You must switch on your phone's security features to protect your phone
- Use the keypad lock so that thieves cannot immediately access your phone, or use the biometric authentication if your phone has it (finger print or facial recognition)
- Your phone may have other security features you can use – these could allow you to wipe data, lock your handset, or prevent a thief from restoring a phone to its factory settings from another internet device
- Consider installing an anti-theft app. These can be an effective way of helping police trace your phone and identify the thief

Know how to identify your phone if it's stolen

- Every phone has an IMEI number which helps police and insurance companies to identify it if it's stolen. UK network operators can also stop a stolen phone from working across their networks with its IMEI
- Find your IMEI number by dialling *#06# from your phone and keep a written note of it; if the phone is stolen, report the number to your mobile provider to stop it being used
- Register your valuables on an accredited property database.

I would like to encourage parents and students to report any incidents to police as well as any information that could lead to identifying any suspect(s). If an incident is happening at the time or has just occurred, please call 999 immediately (get someone near you to do this if your phone has been taken). This gives us the best chance of apprehending the offenders and is the most effective way of reducing robberies. I do understand that students can be quite scared as offenders often make threats, please rest assured that we are sensitive to this and have procedures in place to reassure and safeguard victims and witnesses. If a student is scared and does not want to talk directly with us then I would encourage them to report the incident to Fearless.org who will provide police with an anonymous report.

I would also encourage every parent and student to look at the following:
- www.immobilise.com (register any personal items for free and increase your chances of having it returned if it is ever lost or stolen.)

- Panic Guard app (this app allows the user to create safe routes monitored through GPS, to record audio and video discretely and upload it to the cloud if an incident occurs) (Flyer attached)

As a parent of children myself I understand this letter may indeed worry you. But please remember that the fear of crime is far, far greater than the risk of becoming a victim of it. The South West remains the safest area of London in relation to personal robberies and we remain committed to working with our local communities in reducing crime across all four Boroughs.

Yours Sincerely,

Mark Sanna
Merton Youth Engagement Police Sergeant