

Fraud Protect Officer

A focused and proactive role working with a multi-agency approach to tackle fraud and reduce the number of fraud victims

First published

17 May 2024

Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention
Topic	Cybercrime including fraud
Organisation	Gloucestershire Constabulary
Contact	Neil Drakeley
Email address	neil.drakeley@gloucestershire.police.uk
Region	South West
Partners	Government department Health services Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	June 2022
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Communities General public Victims
---------------------	--

Aim

A study conducted in March 2021 showed that fraud reporting to Gloucestershire Constabulary's Force Control Room had increased over 500% since the start of the pandemic (March 2020). Reporting rates continued to increase during 2021, possibly fuelled by further lockdowns and the increased isolation of some of the most vulnerable members of our community. Action Fraud data indicates that a total of £19.5 million was lost by Gloucestershire victims during 2021.

A Fraud Protect Officer Role was introduced to focus on fraud trends, victim care and communication of fraud prevention information. The aim of this role was to minimise and disrupt fraud within Gloucestershire through increasing awareness around fraud.

Intended outcome

- Increased education and warnings are communicated to the community with agreed, consistent, key messages to protect communities from fraud.
- Increased Intelligence reports from the members of the public and partners which can be shared with appropriate partners in a timely and consistent format.
- Education of members of the force, such as PCSOs, to ensure that they are confident in advising the public on fraud.
- Providing a joined-up approach to victim care and signposting to services which can support.
- Reducing the prevalence of fraud in Gloucestershire.

Description

Gloucestershire Constabulary have recruited a Fraud Protect (FP) officer. The FP officer role has started to be used in some forces, but there is little national structure relating to what the role

should entail.

In Gloucestershire, the Fraud Protect Officer plays a key role in working with multiple agencies to deliver safeguarding messages and use data to identify key trends and risks. The role in Gloucestershire is a full-time, permanent staff role at scale 6.

Raising Awareness

- The FP officer works with PCSOs to identify groups to deliver presentations to. These include groups who may be vulnerable or at risk of becoming a victim of fraud.
- The FP officer delivers safeguarding presentations directly to members of the public, for example, people in care homes, Women's Institute (WI) groups and church coffee mornings. The FP officer either does this with a PCSO or on their own .
- In 2023, the FP officer delivered 70 presentations to nearly 1600 people.
- Created marketing materials to raise awareness, for example pens with the action fraud number on it and branded coffee coasters.
- Uses 'Your Community' alerts to send targeted quick-time messaging about current instances of fraud in the local area.

Supporting Practitioners

- Delivers training around fraud prevention and messaging to new PCSOs and Volunteer PCSOs. The training covers vulnerability and highlights the different types of fraud.
- Delivers briefings for officers and PCSOs regarding the type of fraud that is ongoing in the area.
- Uses data to monitor fraud levels and identify key trends and risks. Action Fraud send through a weekly list of local victims of fraud (this includes information regarding who has been a victim of fraud, how much money has been lost and the type of fraud). The FP officer creates a monthly report based on this information which are shared with neighbourhood policing teams. This sharing allows officers to warn communities (individuals and organisations) about fraud trends and provide information on techniques to keep safe.
- Responsible for updating the communications team with key messages about current fraud.
- Communicates with the NHS on advice to protect yourself against fraud for staff and patients in doctor's surgeries. These are added to their patient newsletter.
- Registered the force as Friends Against Scams Organisations (National Trading Standards Scams Team initiative) and completed training to be a Trading Standards Scam Champion.

The fraud handbook:

- The FP officer created a 'fraud handbook' to collate information about fraud in one accessible place for officers and staff to use.
- The handbook is available via the force intranet and is also circulated to neighbourhood policing teams.
- The handbook is a low cost, low resource project which took the FP officer a couple of months to complete and has been approved by a Sergeant and Inspector.
- The fraud handbook brings together force fraud information, explaining key acronyms and abbreviations.

Overall impact

Direct interventions

- 32 proactive and intelligence-led individual safeguarding interventions conducted with vulnerable victims of crime.
- 145 individual safeguarding interventions conducted as a result of referrals since May 2022.

Public messages and alerts

- 21 public warning messages issued to our communities since May 2022 via Your Community Alerts, Twitter, BBC radio, and the Constabulary website; reaching an audience of over 189,000.

Fraud safeguarding presentations to the public

- 33 presentations delivered to local community groups since August 2022; resulting in direct engagement with over 700 individuals.
- 8 presentations (so far) delivered to high-risk groups at residential care facilities in 2023.

The fraud handbook

- This handbook has received positive feedback from officers in the force and has enabled them to proactively deal with fraud issues without additional support.
- The impact can be seen through a reduction in questions received by the joint team mailbox managed by the FP officer.

Anecdotally, it is reported that neighbourhood policing teams feel they have enhanced their capability and confidence in delivering safeguarding interventions with vulnerable victims of crime in their local communities due to the learning resources and workshops the FP officer has delivered.

Learning

- The FP officer role doesn't have a large budget for disseminating safeguarding messages. Therefore, the FP officer needs to be innovative with how to maximise impact. One way the FP officer has done this in Gloucestershire has been through using QR codes to engage with younger people while saving on the cost of printing materials.
- The FP officer in Gloucestershire uses social media to spread messages. This requires a strong collaborative relationship with force communications teams so that bigger campaigns are put on main force social media channels.
- While QR codes and social media use are cost effective, they are not always as useful for certain audiences – for example, elderly community in care homes. Here mechanisms such as leaflets are more useful.
- Gloucestershire Constabulary have found that running joint sessions with different policing teams can help spread the fraud prevention messaging. For example, the Constabulary have hosted a session for a local rotary club which included inputs from firearms and a tour of custody as well as the input from the fraud protect officer.
- The FP officer in Gloucestershire has found it can be challenging to build a network of stakeholders within the police to help spread awareness. To combat this, the FP officer should attend neighbourhood team briefings and be prepared to proactively introduce themselves to different groups, such as the Women's Institute, Rotary Clubs, Probus Clubs and care homes within their area.
- In terms of external engagement, the FP officer can arrange presentations via emails and letters as well as receiving invitations from the local community.
- While it can be costly and resource intensive to hire out community centres to deliver presentations – other methods can be used to host events. For example, the FP officer in Gloucestershire joined up with the force 'neighbourhood engagement' vehicles and spent a couple of hours engaging with the public in the town centre. Additionally, the FP officer in Gloucestershire has arranged with local banks to stand in their premises during peak days/hours and give out fraud prevention advice to customers.

Copyright

The copyright in this shared practice example is not owned or managed by the College of Policing and is therefore not available for re-use under the terms of the Non-Commercial College Licence. You will need to seek permission from the copyright owner to reproduce their works.

Legal disclaimer

Disclaimer: The views, information or opinions expressed in this shared practice example are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or views of the College of Policing or the organisations involved.

Tags

Fraud