

CASE STUDY – COMMUNITY SAFETY WARDEN, NEWCASTLE UNDER-LYME

In January, the Community Safety Warden received reports from businesses over the town centre radios, as well as from the local community, regarding an individual believed to be at risk of exploitation. The gentleman, who was then identified, appeared to have learning difficulties and was asking for money to buy food and game vouchers. Upon speaking with him, it became clear that he was extremely distressed, stating he had no money and had recently fallen victim to scammers.

The Community Safety Warden spoke with the gentleman and identified him as someone who was vulnerable and potentially susceptible to fraud. The gentleman shared that, in previous years, he had been scammed out of over £1,000 through dating websites, where scammers persuaded him to use encrypted apps for further communication. He explained that the individual involved currently had requested that he purchase game vouchers for her.

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The investigation revealed that the gentleman had entered a local shop on three separate occasions that day, each time purchasing £20 game vouchers, for a total of £60. When asked if he suspected any form of blackmail, he stated that he believed the requests were in the context of arranging a meeting with the woman. Upon further examination of the messages by the Community Safety Warden, it was apparent that the images and videos sent by the woman were fabricated, with the video containing a watermark indicating it was AI-generated.

Additionally, the Community Safety Warden determined that this situation was likely part of an organised crime operation. The gentleman involved had received multiple messages from the woman's supposed dance teacher, along with other accounts involved in the scam. The Community Safety Warden advised the gentleman to block the individual immediately, as they were continuing to try and extort money from him. Despite this advice, the gentleman insisted on attempting to recover his funds and continued messaging the scammers, who responded with abuse, including derogatory remarks. They also promised to return his money in person if he sent an additional £20, even though after his first three payments, he was under the pretence that each time they would meet, however following each payment excuses arose, one of these including 'Having a flat tire'.

After much persuasion, the Community Safety Warden succeeded in getting the gentleman to block the scammers and to call his mother to explain the situation. Despite his anxiety, which stemmed from previous similar incidents, his mother reassured him that he would not be evicted and agreed to meet him to return home. Concluding the incident, the gentleman was extremely grateful and insisted on hugging the Community Safety Warden for the support and sympathy provided.

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Progress was made in engaging with the individual, initially, the Community Safety Warden adapted their communication strategies several times, as some methods did not seem to capture the gentleman's attention effectively. The Community Safety Warden began by asking detailed questions to understand the situation, ensuring that the gentleman did not feel threatened, and that no personal information had been compromised by the scammers.

To provide reassurance, the Community Safety Warden empathised with the gentleman's fear of being kicked out by his mother, which appeared to be a significant concern for him. The Community Safety Warden advised that money is replaceable and, considering the gentleman's age and his mum's continuous support, she likely wouldn't take this action. They also reassured him that if needed, they could explore other options to accommodate him.

As the conversation progressed and the gentleman became more focused on retrieving his money from the scammers, the Community Safety Warden noticed a shift in the gentleman's attention and engagement. To regain control of the conversation, the Community Safety Warden adopted a more assertive approach, telling the gentleman to put down his phone and focus on the discussion. The Community Safety Warden was then able to clarify that his funds would not be returned by the scammers and stressed the importance of involving his mother as the first step to mitigate the situation. The Community Safety Warden also offered to contact the gentleman's mother directly to explain the situation on his behalf.

Finally, the Community Safety Warden provided the gentleman with his contact details, should the situation change, and ensured that he knew how to reach out if necessary. After the encounter, the Community Safety Warden informed the PCSO at the station, who requested the information in an email format for further follow-up. He also planned to check with the harm reduction hub to see if the gentleman was partnered with them, so that they could be made aware of the situation.

The gentleman was extremely grateful for the Community Safety Warden's time and even messaged once he arrived home thanking the Community Safety Warden for the support that was offered.