

Cllr Millard: Hello and welcome to Talk Richmond, a podcast brought to you by Richmond Council and hosted by me Councillor Jim Millard. In this week's episode I'll be talking about personal robberies - or muggings - in the borough. Whilst this year's figures are low because of people staying at home due to coronavirus, as well as preventative action taken by the police and community groups, the number of personal robberies in 2018 and 2019 caused a lot of concern in the community. Young people are often the victim as well as the suspect, and as we currently in school Summer Holidays, it feels like the right time to discuss how we can help keep our young people safe.

Our guests joining us today are Sergeant Scott Brodie from the Metropolitan Police and Barbara Lingle Elliot from the community group, Mothers Against Muggings. Together, we will be discussing the facts around the issue and looking at what the community is doing to make sure Richmond remains one of the safest boroughs in London. So first of all, Hello Scott.

Scott: Hi good morning.

Cllr Millard: Good morning, it's great to have you on the podcast.

Scott: Thank you for having me.

Cllr Millard: How are you doing?

Scott: Yes, not too bad. Thank you. Not too bad.

Cllr Millard: Good good. So Scott it be good for our listeners to get to know you a little bit. Your title is Richmond Cluster Neighborhood Sergeant, I believe, what does this mean?

Scott: So I look after the three Richmond wards, so all sort of around the Town Centre, so that being the South Richmond, the North Richmond, and the Kew wards.

So I have three teams that are dedicated to those particular areas or when we have bigger issues then we will work as one big team to tackle those issues. So I have a police officers on each of those wards as well as police community support officers, as well.

Cllr Millard: Great stuff. So it be good to kick things off by explaining what we mean by personal robberies and what they often involve.

Scott: Sure, so um effectively the personal robbery side of things is effectively, a theft or where, where something is stolen from someone and the person stealing from that person is threatening to use force or they're using force in order to commit that offense. Fortunately, I think in the vast majority of robberies, I think only about 1/3 of them is where a weapon has been threatened or or used against a person. And most of our robberies take place traditionally in the sort of darker hours, where they they can commit that offense and feel that they are a bit safe because they have the cover of darkness behind them.

Scott: But um yes, so far is sort of where we get the majority of our offences - South Richmond is traditionally and currently unfortunately one of the worst affected. As well as the sort of Twickenham Riverside Area and North Richmond. A lot of these offences are happening in parks and open spaces, usually anywhere where young people will gather or or where they congregate.

Cllr Millard: and what sort of items are generally stolen?

Scott: So it tends to be things like mobile phones. Obviously a mobile phone these days can cost upwards of 1000 pounds. Cash, any cash the person might have on them. Clothing in some circumstances, bags, and bicycles. And obviously now with electric scooters we've had offenses where some of those have been stolen as well. Uh, anything small and high value, really.

Cllr Millard: is there a particular age group are being targeted as victims and who is targeting them?

Scott: I think it's about 70% of victims and suspects are under the age of 20. It's often the younger people, unfortunately. and not just to Richmond as a borough either. It seems to be the way across the most of all robberies in the MET.

Uh, I think that the reason, unfortunately, this is the case, I think the younger people obviously don't have that same level of consequence to them with what they do, their actions, and what might happen. I think in other parts of London, fortunately not for Richmond as a borough, there's obviously a a gang culture in some areas where it's almost seen as like an initiation for some young people to carry out an offensive robbery or a violent crime. I think for Richmond, though, it's generally that the younger people are an easy target. Even if there are in groups, sometimes there are unfortunately other groups of people who will prey on them because they know that Richmond, being quite an affluent area, the younger people are probably going to have a mobile phone on them that's worth 800 or 1000 pounds. If there riding a bicycle, you know that bicycle is probably going to be worth you know 500 to 1000 pounds.

Cllr Millard: And that's I think that's really good to have that concepts, because of course, you know we are aware that Richmond is one of the safest boroughs in London, but this concern has come about because over the last two or three years we have seen, haven't we an increase in the number of personal robberies compared to previous years. What sort of numbers are we talking about there?

Scott: So I can say for 2017 to 2019 we had a pretty huge jump of 216 victims of robbery in 2017 to 406 for 2019 year on year. The area as a whole is as as recently and in in in past years been attracting more and more people from outside of the borough. Uhm, this is obviously very very nice area in Richmond Town Centre. People like to go there, especially at the moment during lockdown is a gathering place for a lot of people.

Cllr Millard: Yes, and so given that increase, that raise concerns then action was taken. And again we have to set this in the new context because obviously now people staying at home due to coronavirus obviously meant the crime levels across the country have decreased for a period of time in quite a different way, which is

going to throw sort of temporary short-term statistics completely out, I imagine, but it's worth noting you know, that incidents of muggings in the borough were declining before the lockdown, thanks to the work being done by the police and the other partners. And as I understand it, in the second half of 2019, so that's from July to December, as a result of what was being done, there was a 25% reduction of incidents in the bar and a huge 52% reduction in Richmond Town Centre, which is, as you say, is a hotspot area. So, can you tell us about what the police were doing to see this fall in incidents?

Scott: Yes, so I obviously look after the, South Richmond is one of my teams and the robbery issue was a serious concern. So, uh, me and my team we put together a fairly detailed policing plan. I know that recently we've had a number of fairly good arrests by the by the neighborhood teams, and the response teams. We've got the, uh, a team called the Youth Integrated Offender Management Team, who will use what we call Achilles heel tactics um to target our robbery offenders, people that we've identified in committing robberies. So that could be, uh, things like going to their schools, and it could be things like speaking to their parents, them being referred to the Youth Services or the Youth Offending Team within the police as well.

We've also got a proactive unit and obviously the the local teams themselves, who have been providing huge huge amounts of intelligence on our robbery offenders, taking that information from our other teams in the youth integrated Offender Management team and using that to specifically use tactics like stop and search for people that we think are we call habitual knife carriers or habitual weapon carriers and we've had a few, in recent months, we've had a two or three people just in the South Richmond area have been carrying weapons and taking those weapons off of the street.

Scott: last year and this year the Safer Neighborhood Boards had granted us funding for uhm, for Richmond Youth Services because last year and hopefully this year they had the youth inquiry service bus on Richmond Green on Friday evenings over the summer holiday period. Uh, so this this helps us quite a lot. It gave the the young people - potential victims - somewhere to go that was safe Someone to talk to, someone to get advice from, and I think that had a fairly fairly big impact as well.

Scott: And before I joined even, the officers had put together a working group with Barbara and Felicity from Mothers against Muggings, they did a lot of work with them, and obviously they've done so much within the schools and talking to these young people to try to educate them about about what's been happening.

Cllr Millard: We're now going to hear from Barbara from Mothers Against Mugging about the work they've done to help educate young people on how to stay safe when out and about. Hi Barbara. Welcome to talk Richmond. Hi Barbara. Welcome to Talk Richmond.

Barbara: Thank you for having me.

Barbara: Sure, um, in 2018 we came together as an Action Group um because we were so concerned - my Co-Chair and I had discovered just through casual chat that ten of our boys friends had been mugged. 10 independent kids had been mugged, so we just said no, absolutely not. So, we went to the police and we went to our local councillors and we said how can we help you? And from that it spun into a working group with the Council, the Safer Neighborhood Board, a couple of local charities and we have built a assembly program for all the teens of the borough - each child gets a oyster wallet and in assembly program that talks them through personal safety.

Cllr Millard: It's really brilliant, and I think the wallets that you've produced. If you can just describe them for listeners, you know they've got the five different senses on there...

Barbara: Yes, so we went through. I'm going to have to look at it. We went. Eyes up, not on your phone, ears open, not plugged in because they're all wearing the headphones and adults too - knock that off please, take one out please – hands, put away your stuff - I just saw a child yesterday walking down the street with two iPhones. Now there's barely anybody on street thank God but could have easily walked over and taken both and kept going and I'm a 50 year old woman with a dog so we have to put this stuff away. You can't walk around with your phones. Feet - if

you see trouble move away. And then mouth - we really want everybody, adults, teens, kids to report every crime every time. We need to support the police by reporting what we see, where we see it and when we see it. Because then they have the crime statistics to get more police where we need them.

Cllr Millard: It's fantastic and, you know, I think what's so important is when people like you in your Co-Chair come forward from the community with an idea about how to improve things. It's really great to support that and I'm really pleased the Police and the Council have put resources into that. And what were the results?

Barbara: Well, we were really excited to see that after the first six months to year after we started our programming and working with the police and getting different key stakeholders involved, we were able to see a drop of 50% in crime against teens in the borough. It wasn't just us, it was, you know, getting more police on the streets, it was getting the police where the kids needed them to be. And one thing that I really, really would like all the citizens of Richmond borough to pay attention to is - it takes all of us, you know, none of us liked the crime statistics, what's going on but it takes all of us to work to help get rid of it. We all have to report these things to the police - we as a community if we want to live in a nice place, have to step up and participate in this.

Cllr Millard: yes. Is a fantastic example of all sorts of different parts of the community working together. And I think you're right. You know, reporting helps the police to build up a picture and a file, and to get more resources where needed.

Cllr Millard: Now is a good time to hear from Alex. Alex is 18 and goes to school in the borough. We spoke to him about his experience last year.

Alex: It was on the 5th April of last year. Me and a few other friends had been out to dinner in Richmond and afterwards me, my friend Dylan and my other friend Hollie we decided to go sit on Richmond Green, it was about 9 o'clock at night, it had just turned dark, there weren't many people on the green and we were just sitting there listening to music. Two guys walked over, walked past us, and I think we kind of instantly knew that something wasn't quite right with that, and then came back and

started talking to us. They started asking us where we were from, were we from the local area and then it quickly became clear that they were out to mug us. They asked for our phones primarily. They asked us to take off iCloud, take off our passwords so that they would have access to them. They clearly knew what they were doing. And obviously having had talks from school and that sort of thing, we complied and handed over our phones. They did threaten us with a knife – we didn't see a knife, but we weren't willing to check, basically. And after that they took our phones. I think the most important point to stress is do everything you can not to put yourself in a compromising situation by being careful in terms of being in crowded areas – you want to be somewhere where there are people around you, where you're not alone and you can call for help if necessary. Also in terms of being in the incident, secondly, don't do anything stupid – don't try and be a hero or anything like that. It's, at the end of the day, your phone or your wallet or anything like that is much much less valuable than your health and your safety – so you should always put those things first. And do get onto the police, kind of the third point, and try as much as you can to give all the evidence you can and really support them through the process because they are looking to help you out.

Cllr Millard: So Scott, what I hear is that young people are often reluctant to report crime, and it is obviously really important. Scott, How should they go about reporting a mugging?

Scott: So the best way really is obviously if you were to see and speak to a police officer face to face, which obviously is not always as easy as that, we have obviously the emergency 999 system should always be the first port of call, if you're the victim of a crime. If it's a case where it's not quite as urgent, we have the Metropolitan Police website, which is very very easy to report crime on, and then obviously an officer will get back in touch with you once that report is made within 24 to 48 hours in most cases. Hum. Obviously in person at a police station or via the 101 service as well, which I should stress in a situation where it's not an emergency. We understand obviously that some people are a bit apprehensive about coming forward with information to the place of reporting crime to us. So there's obviously independent charity Crime Stoppers, where you don't have to give your information and you can report crime by that and you can call their service on 0800 555 111. From Crime

Stoppers as well, more specifically geared to younger people, is another website called Fearless, which I think is a branch of Crime Stoppers and they have a lot of information about crime and plenty of resources about crime and criminality from a sort of preventative perspective, as well as a cure perspective and they have a very easy to fill in online form on their website which is fearless.org, and again that's that can be totally anonymous as well.

Cllr Millard: Fantastic, that's really fantastic and so important .Well, thank you, Scott or should I say Sergeant Brodie. Thanks for joining us. It's been great to talk to you.

Scott: Thanks for having me Jim, really appreciate it.

Cllr Millard: Thanks very much to both Barbara and Scott for coming on episode three of talk Richmond, and while of course, Richmond upon Thames, as we've said, has some of the lowest crime rates in London, it is worth reiterating, it's important to think about personal safety and for young people, in particular, to take precautions while out and about in London. In the next episode we'll be talking about the impacts of coronavirus on businesses in the borough, what they're doing to recover and the importance of shopping locally.

For further information on the topics discussed, check out the show notes below. If you have any questions email us on talk@richmond.gov.uk. Please give us a rating and leave a review - it helps others find the podcast, especially if you put five stars, I'm told, don't know if that's true. But thank you. I'm Jim Millard. Thanks for listening.