



22 March 2020

Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Palace of Westminster
Westminster
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Robert

One of the priorities of my Police & Crime Plan is, 'Older but not overlooked' and in these unprecedented times I have asked the Constabulary of Gloucestershire to pay particular attention to these people due to the certainty that it is the elderly and vulnerable who face the greatest threat from Covid-19 and the risk of related criminal activity

After 40 years' experience within policing and justice, I am sadly aware that there is a small minority in society who will see this crisis as an opportunity to scam, defraud, exploit or undermine those who are most vulnerable.

In contrast, the overwhelming majority will be those who are altruistic, selfless and truly amazing.

The purpose of writing is to advise you that I have asked my Chief Constable to prioritise any report of such crimes; expedite relevant investigations and take all steps possible to prevent further offences.

Today, I am also writing to the Chief Crown Prosecutor for the South West to ask her to prioritise CPS charging decisions for any such offences and also to the Chair of the Magistrates Bench to advise them that in the public interest, the Gloucestershire Constabulary may oppose bail in such cases that they previously may have not.

Furthermore whilst fully respecting the independence of the judiciary, in who I have full confidence, I would ask that you consider some revisions to the sentencing guidelines.

I respectfully suggest that the public would fully support and expect a severe sentence, likely to include a substantial period of custody, for anyone who commits fraud or deception against the elderly who are self-isolating, or a crime that in any way takes advantage of the current pandemic.

The Theft Act and other legislation provides ample provision to deal with those who criminally seek to gain from this pandemic. However, it is essential that those who transgress must be in no doubt that, if found guilty, their crime will attract a sentence at the higher end of the provisions within the Acts.

My experience tells me that whatever the official position taken, those who offend against the vulnerable are unlikely to read the Daily Mail, Independent or listen to the BBC or any other mainstream publication, so I have asked my Chief Constable to use the channels I know they have, to warn such people. My experience also leads me to hope, and believe, that many within the criminal fraternity would deplore such crimes and support the view that crimes against the vulnerable are totally unacceptable.

A strong message from you to those who would criminally seek to exploit the vulnerable would, in my opinion, be timely and welcomed by the public and you can be assured of my full support should you feel able to speak out.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MAS', with a horizontal line underneath.

Martin Surl
Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire