



## **Lost Property Recording within the Police Service**

### **Introduction**

Over the years the police service has traditionally accepted the responsibility of recording lost and found property. They have made the enquiries to re-unite owners with their lost property, however, there is no statutory duty for the police to maintain a system of recording non-evidential property (lost and found). The public have accepted the police as the reporting/recording agents in this respect and come to expect this as a service.

Since the advent of social media, pressures to reduce non-essential demand and associated costs and bureaucracy, a national review was undertaken by the Police Front Counters Forum (PFCF) on behalf of the Collaborative Law Enforcement Programme – Evidential Management Group (CLEP).

### **Method**

A survey was sent to all those forces engaged in the PFCF and also those engaged in the Home Office lead CLEP. That data was then collated by PFCF and discussed over a series of National meetings to find a consensus amongst those forces present. The paper will seek to outline that agreement whilst ensuring other matters raised by individual forces are also fully captured. A list of all those forces that engaged in this piece of work are captured in Appendix A.

### **Governance**

This report will be submitted to the PFCF Sponsor, ACC Todd for discussion with CC Simon Cole as the NPCC lead for Local Policing. Assuming there is support, the report will be passed back to the CLEP for onward management and implementation.

### **Findings**

**Reporting** - Of the 29 forces that contributed to the study, 20 of them have a policy to record as lost those items reported to be lost and which are not the subject of crime and which should they be found the record may assist in identifying the owner of the item. The forces all have some degree of control in place which prevents the reporting of certain identifiable items to reduce bureaucracy.

Of the six forces that answered 'no' to taking lost reports, with the exception of Cumbria and Beds, reports were taken for foreign passports/documentation or if the person reporting is vulnerable. A couple of these forces have a facility to allow a member of the public to be able to print a letter off for insurance purposes on their websites.

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Three of the forces (Lancashire, Suffolk and Northumbria) will only take lost reports in certain circumstances, for example high value items or cash.

All of the forces that take reports do so over the counter or via the telephone with 12 having online web based systems in place. Two forces also allow the reporting of lost property via e-mail.

**Use of external companies** - Only one of the forces surveyed stated they used Virtual Bumblebee (at an approximate annual cost of £8k) whereas others had their own web based systems in place specifically for the purpose.

Four forces fully subsidise to the Report My Loss system provided by Recipero, the company that also provides the NMPR and Immobilise. Some forces use Report My Loss under the 'public pays' model. The MPS signpost the public to Immobilise which is the free service offered by Recipero.

No forces currently use Lost Box which is a free service available to the public.

Five forces do not currently recommend the use of other recording sites to the public such as Immobilise, MEND, and Bike Register websites.

**Repatriation checks** - Information regarding action taken following a lost property report was fairly standard across the country with checks being made against found property records contained within force systems. One force has paper found records so a check within this force means asking other front counters to physically check the records.

**Retention of records** - The records relating to lost property reports have vastly varied periods of retention attached to them with some keeping them for 28 days right up until 6 years. Some forces do not retain any records as they are housed outside of the organisation on third party sites.

**Out of 'jurisdiction' reports** - Reports of property lost outside of a Police area are not always taken by all forces and signposting to the 'owning' force occurs to maximise the opportunity of repatriating the lost property with loser.

Reports of property lost on public transport systems or in public or private buildings where provision is made for the recording of lost property are not recorded by the majority of forces.

Property lost whilst in the custody of public or private postal or courier services are not recorded by some forces whereas others are doing so. The view of the group was that this is not something that is required

**Time limits** - Some forces take reports of lost property quite some time after the original lost occurred whereas the majority will only take the reports in line with their found property retention timescales.

**Risks and Issues**

**Vulnerable customers** – There are always going to be members of the public that are considered vulnerable and require further support. The group discussed this at length and felt that it was important that any decision regarding the future recording took into account the service provision to be provided to those considered to be most in need within our communities.

**Public satisfaction** - Most forces were concerned about the impact removing the lost reporting service would have on the confidence and satisfaction of the public. There was however evidence presented by those forces that have already made the switch to move away from lost reporting. The actual impact in reality to public satisfaction is remarkably low with one force reporting single figure complaints in the first year or so post implementation. Whilst this provides some reassurance, it is important to note that it is still a potential risk.

The implementation seems to have played an important part in helping to keep complaints down. Use of posters, effective communication plans both externally and internally engaging with key stakeholders had all helped. Some forces also created a letter that explained the policy in relation to this process which could be provided to those that needed some form of 'proof' they had attended a police station. A copy of the letter used by Cumbria Police is included as Appendix B.

**Operation Hole** – Operation Hole is a national operation run by police forces up and down the country in conjunction with Immigration Enforcement. It focuses on immigration offenders who were consistently passing through front counters reporting various property as lost or stolen and therefore never being checked by Immigration Enforcement to be able to subject to some level of control. Whilst there is potential that this operation could be affected by the implementation of the recommendation in this report, the group felt that this could be adequately managed to reduce the risk presented.

**Repatriation** – Those forces that were able to provide data in relation to the repatriation rate between lost reports and property handed in as found reported that on average it was between 1-2% of all lost records being recorded. The motives for the majority of lost reports seem to be to satisfy other reporting requirements e.g. insurance, other agency (social services).

**Insurance companies** - The group agreed that where possible, the Police service should seek to avoid duplication of reporting which should be completed by insurance companies in the processing of claims. The information recorded by the Police service is very rarely accessed by the insurance companies even to clarify that a report has been taken. This includes reports of property lost within the home or any other locations where they are irretrievable (e.g. bottom of the river) which are usually only recorded for insurance purposes.

**Savings** – Whilst there are potentially savings to be made with regards to ceasing to offer a lost reporting service, the majority of forces felt that this was more than likely to be non-cashable revenue savings. The public, for a time,

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are more than likely to continue to attend a police station or make contact with the police for this purpose so will still need to be dealt with. However a consistently applied nationwide change is more likely to see a swifter change in behaviour that could demonstrate savings from reduced callers both in person and to contact centres.

### **Recommendations**

The NPCC lead is requested to note the contents of the report and confirm support/give direction on the recommendations made by the group for onward submission to the CLEP. The Police Front Counter Forum membership makes the following recommendations;

#### **Recommendation 1**

The police service in England and Wales cease the recording of lost property reports.

#### **Recommendation 2**

All forces signpost the public to external providers ensuring that vulnerable members of the public are given a high quality service at the point of contact.

#### **Recommendation 3**

A consistent approach to the implementation of Recommendation 1 is applied under the direction of the Police Front Counters Forum on behalf of the CLEP.

**Appendix A**

The forces who actively engaged in this piece of work by attending meetings or returning data were:

- 1 Avon and Somerset
- 2 Bedfordshire
- 3 Cheshire
- 4 Cleveland
- 5 Cumbria
- 6 Devon and Cornwall
- 7 Dorset
- 8 Durham
- 9 Essex
- 10 Gloucestershire
- 11 Gwent
- 12 Hampshire
- 13 Herts
- 14 Immigration Enforcement
- 15 Kent
- 16 Lancashire
- 17 Leicestershire
- 18 Merseyside
- 19 North Wales
- 20 Northumbria
- 21 Nottinghamshire
- 22 PSNI
- 23 South Wales
- 24 Staffordshire
- 25 Suffolk
- 26 Surrey
- 27 Thames Valley
- 28 West Mercia
- 29 West Midlands
- 30 West Yorkshire
- 31 Wiltshire

**Appendix B**

**Cumbria Police – Details from letter issued to members of the public attending a front counter.**

Information about the reporting of Lost Property

As part of an insurance claim for lost property, you have asked your customer/client to report this lost property to the police, or to provide a lost property reference number.

For your information, Cumbria Police does not take reports of lost property and therefore are unable to issue lost property reference numbers as they do not investigate or validate claims of loss.

This is because lost property is not a police matter, so there is no legal requirement to report it to us.

We have asked your customer / client to advise you of this and this notice is confirmation of the above.

More information about our lost property procedure can be found by visiting [www.cumbria.police.uk/lostandfound](http://www.cumbria.police.uk/lostandfound).