

### **Credit crunch brings crack down on shoplifters in Watford**

WATFORD BUSINESS AGAINST CRIME is stepping up its efforts in the run up towards Christmas this year and has issued a stark warning to would-be shoplifters in the town: If you are caught, you could be banned from much of the town centre until Christmas 2009!

As the busiest shopping period of the year begins in earnest, there are a group of retailers determined not to fall prey to criminals who may operate in the town centre.

Watford Business Against Crime is a scheme that encourages its members to share information and intelligence with each other and with the police on individuals who come into the town centre intent on committing crime.

In conjunction with the police, Watford Business Against Crime issues a 'Top 12' every three months to member shops. The 'Top 12' is the names and photos of 12 of the most prolific shoplifters in the area. This regularly updated list ensures that staff know who to watch out for.

Prolific shoplifters or those who engage in threatening or anti-social behaviour can also now be banned for a year from all member shops – over 30 of the biggest and most popular shops in Watford (including John Lewis, Marks & Spencer, BHS, T J Hughes and Primark) - and the Harlequin Shopping Centre.

Once someone is banned, if they return and continue to shoplift at any time during their ban, the penalties they can expect will be much more severe than those they would normally get for shoplifting.

Pauline O'Brien, who manages Watford Business Against Crime said:

"This is the busiest and best time of the year for retailers and shoppers alike. We need to make sure that people who come to shop in Watford feel safe and able to go about their shopping without fear of mixing with criminals.

"All our members have radios to communicate with each other, the CCTV centres and the police.

“What that means is that criminals may think they have got away with stealing goods from a store, but whilst they merrily make off with their ill gotten gains, they are being tracked every step of the way. And in all likelihood, before they leave the town centre, a police officer will appear to greet them and relieve them of their heavy shopping bags!”

“There is a perception that shoplifting is a victimless crime, but it isn’t. Someone has to pay for the losses incurred through shoplifting, and in the end, the people that pay are the rest of us through increased prices.

“Watford is generally a very safe place to shop, and members of Watford Business Against Crime are determined to keep it that way. The message to shoplifters is clear – Stay out of Watford or risk a ban and a criminal record.”

NOT FOR PUBLICATION: For further information call Pauline O’Brien, Watford Business Against Crime on 01923 802304 or 07595 218136.

Watford Business Against Crime is a membership scheme run by the Watford & West Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce. There are currently between 30-40 members. Each member is part of the Watford Business Against Crime radio network. Members meet at least once a month to share intelligence and information with each other and with the police. The newly implemented exclusion zone applies to all member stores, including communal areas of the Harlequin Shopping Centre.

Watford Business Against Crime is supported by Hertfordshire Police and Watford Borough Council.