

**Cheshire Police Scam awareness week – distraction thefts**

**Keeping safe whilst out shopping**

The offenders tend to target older people who are shopping in the supermarket. They watch the victim while they enter their payment card PIN into the chip and pin device at the checkout. Then once the victim has placed their shopping in their car and their handbag on the passenger seat, one offender will distract the victim by asking for directions, while an accomplice steals the victim’s bank card from their purse. The offenders will then empty the victim’s account of cash either at cash machines or by going on a spending spree.

Police are keen to remind the public to be vigilant and take steps to prevent thieves from taking their cards.

The most frequent kind of purse theft is 'handbag dipping', where offenders remove purses from handbags left unzipped or unattended.

Bank cards are often used by offenders very quickly, often even before the victim realises the purse has been taken. In market towns, this offence is often more prevalent on market days which see large numbers of visitors.

**Reduce your chances**

* Do not leave your handbag hung over the shopping trolley or unattended at any time. Make sure your bag has a secure zip fastening and for added security, secure your purse inside a zipped pocket inside the bag to help protect against thieves reaching inside your bag or purse to search for valuables.
* If you are approached by a stranger in unusual circumstances in or around a supermarket, do not engage with them, particularly if they ask for directions or change. Be firm with them, walk away, and report any suspicious activity to the police.
* When using a chip & pin device or ATM, always shield your number with your hand. Avoid using cash machines that appear to have been tampered with, or where groups of people are hanging around.
* In restaurants and cafes put your bag on your lap or on the floor between your feet with your foot on the strap. Alternatively place the strap through one leg of the chair.
* Do not carry large amounts of cash with you. Withdraw only money needed at the time.
* Look for ATMs located inside buildings, supermarkets or other busy locations.