

Staffordshire is being victim of the current national trend whereby Romanian offenders target victims in supermarkets, in order to steal their bank card(s) and PIN.¹

Between 10:00hrs to 15:00hrs across the week offenders working in pairs, will 'shoulder surf' whilst elderly, mainly female, victims withdraws cash or pay for shopping to obtain their PIN. Offenders will be male and/or female.

Once the PIN is obtained one or both offenders will follow the target and use one of various distraction methods including:

- Asking for directions to a location often producing a map,
- Stating that the target has dropped money on the floor, and
- Stating there is a problem with the IP's car.

One offender will distract the IP whilst the other steals their card(s). Once offenders have left the IP, often without them realising they have become victim, the card(s) will be used quickly after the theft to purchase goods or withdraw cash from the cash point.

Despite recent arrests through collaborative regional working it is believed that Romanian gangs will continue to impact on our community with this offending. Worryingly offenders are known to have followed their targets to their home address where they approach them using similar distraction methods.

If you are in the queue at a bank machine and someone moves very close to you when it is your turn to put in your PIN number, move away and go somewhere else or go back later. Most people get a 'gut feeling' about things 'not being right', *so trust your instincts and delay using the bank machine.* When you are putting your PIN number into the bank machine, cover up the number pad with your other hand – don't feel embarrassed about doing this, it's the smart thing to do and shows that you are crime prevention savvy. By doing this simple thing, you are protecting yourself from someone looking over your shoulder and noting your PIN.

As an example of people freely putting in their PIN numbers for all to see, take a look when you are queuing up to pay at a store/shop. You will be amazed at how easily it is for someone to note the PIN number down.

If the keypad is in an awkward position, ask the cashier to take it off the stand and pass it to you so you can access it easier. Criminals take full advantage of people putting in their PINs on machines which are set high up at the checkout.

If you are at a 'hole in the wall' cash machine and there is one inside the bank/shop, use the cash machine inside instead, and again, watch out for anyone hovering over you.

Don't write your PIN numbers down and don't leave them in your purse, handbag or wallet. If the PIN number the bank gave you is too hard to remember, you can change it to something that you can easily remember (though don't use 1 2 3 4 or 1111).

Stay safe, make sure you are aware of what is going on around you at all times and PLEASE WARN AS MANY OTHERS as you can about this criminality.
