

Lowestoft Shops Lock Doors After Robbery Surge

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Mobile phone shops in parts of Suffolk and Norfolk have begun locking their doors during trading hours following a rise in violent robberies targeting high-value electronics. The move comes after a brazen daylight raid at a Vodafone store in Lowestoft that left staff and customers shaken.

On 3 July, Suffolk Police responded to reports of a robbery at the Vodafone branch on London Road North in Lowestoft. According to authorities, three masked individuals entered the premises at approximately 3:30 pm and stole a significant quantity of mobile phones from a secure back room.

Police confirmed the swift arrest of four individuals in connection with the incident. Two teenagers from Essex were apprehended in Harleston, near Diss, later that same day. A 22-year-old man and a woman from London were arrested the following day. All four suspects have since been charged with robbery and remanded in custody by magistrates.

In response, Vodafone has implemented new security measures, including a locked-door policy at its Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth stores. The telecoms company stated the decision was made to protect both customers and employees amid growing concern over organised retail thefts.

A Vodafone spokesperson commented: "We have implemented a variety of safety measures in some stores, including a locked-door policy, to ensure they remain safe for customers and employees. This is a disappointing, but necessary step."

The company further revealed that incidents of aggressive robberies have sharply increased across the telecoms sector, especially in London and the Southeast. Vodafone and Three stores have experienced a ninefold rise in such attacks, including attempted robberies.

"Violence of any kind against our employees and customers is completely unacceptable, and their safety is our number one priority," the statement added. Vodafone also confirmed it is working closely with other telecoms providers, police forces, and government officials to improve security standards and address the spike in criminal activity.

The closed-door policy has drawn mixed reactions from residents in Lowestoft. While many acknowledged the necessity for enhanced safety, others expressed concern over the state of the local high street.

Jeevan Hewa Mainaththuge, 34, who visited the Lowestoft store, said he had to wait to be allowed inside. "It's scary, really," he said. "I think it makes sense because people are working there, so they have to look after themselves. It's their safety and the company's safety."

Paula Patterson, 50, also of Lowestoft, agreed. “For the safety of staff, it’s got to be done, but it’s devastating that in a small town like this, you have to.”

Her daughter, Demi Stroud, 30, noted she had seen similar tactics used in London. “I didn’t realise it was happening in Lowestoft, but I’ve seen it in London where people run into the store and yank the phones off walls and displays.”

Other residents commented on how these crimes reflect broader concerns about the decline of the town centre. Debbie Holmes, 59, from Oulton Broad, said: “They’re looking for high-value items; electricals and things like that are a target. It’s just a sorry state of the high street today, which is a sad thing.”

Her husband, David, 70, added: “Do it online, then you haven’t got to lock any shop doors, have you?”

Tony McLeod, 49, from Lowestoft, offered a different perspective, pointing to economic hardship. “It’s not nice to hear, but in this day and age, this is what people are being driven to. People are desperate,” he said. “Most of the gold shops are the same. They won’t let two people in the shop at the same time. You have to wait outside until one customer has finished, then you can go in. I think it’s terrible.”

Suffolk Police have reiterated their commitment to tackling organised retail crime and encouraged local businesses to review their security arrangements. A spokesperson stated that visible patrols and increased cooperation with retailers would continue across affected areas.

As Vodafone and other telecoms providers tighten security in response to the rise in retail violence, many in Lowestoft are left questioning what more can be done to safeguard staff, protect property, and restore confidence in their high streets.