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Man Brandishes Imitation Gun Made from Paper Bag During Attempted Burglary in Telford

August 5, 2025

– Categories: *Breaking News*



A man wielding a makeshift firearm, crafted from a paper shopping bag, has been sentenced to 19 months in prison following a bizarre attempted burglary and confrontation with police in Telford. The incident unfolded on 22 February 2025 and involved threats, public indecency, and a tense moment for officers who initially believed the imitation weapon to be real.

Matthew Sylvester, 37, of no fixed abode, attempted to force entry into a shop in Telford town centre late at night using a shopping trolley. After being seen exposing himself to staff, he wrapped a jumper around his face and created a pistol-like object from a brown *Primark* bag to intimidate responding officers.

When a police patrol arrived, Sylvester ran towards the vehicle, pointing the fake weapon at the passenger-side window and shouting threats. Body-worn camera footage and CCTV captured the dramatic encounter. Officers, unsure of the authenticity of the weapon in the dimly lit car park, tried to reverse the vehicle but were obstructed by car park barriers.

Despite the tense moment, Police Constables Dan Arthur and George Oliver quickly apprehended Sylvester and confirmed the “gun” was a folded paper bag designed to resemble a handgun.

Sylvester was arrested on the spot and charged with multiple offences, including possession of an imitation firearm with intent to cause fear of violence, assaulting emergency workers, attempted burglary, and possession of Class A drugs.

During proceedings at Shrewsbury Crown Court, Sylvester entered guilty pleas partway through his trial. The court heard he was experiencing delusions at the time of the offence, potentially brought on by cocaine use. He was also found to be on licence following a recent prison release for a similar offence. His criminal record included 84 offences across 34 previous convictions.

During sentencing on 27 June 2025, Recorder Anthony Warner remarked: “You spoke of a gun and the paper you had shaped certainly looked like a gun, and that would have been very frightening to the police officers and anybody else who was there.”

The prosecution, led by Danny Smith, detailed how Sylvester threatened the officers, shouting “I have a gun” and demanding they exit the vehicle. Defence solicitor Paul Smith said the accused had been homeless, sleeping rough, and experiencing a “delusional period” at the time of the incident.

Following the sentencing, Chief Inspector Matt Sanders of West Mercia Police commended the officers involved, stating: “The bravery and professionalism shown by both PCs that evening was nothing short of extraordinary. No one should come to work and face violence, and we thank our officers for their quick thinking and commitment to protecting the public.”

Sylvester will serve his sentence in custody, with time already served deducted following standard procedure. The case has raised concerns about mental health challenges faced by recently released offenders and the increasing risks frontline officers face during routine call-outs.