

Repeat Shoplifters Jailed in Burnley Following Targeted Police Operation

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Two persistent offenders who plagued retailers in Burnley town centre have been sentenced, following a concerted effort by local police to clamp down on retail theft. The recent convictions come as part of Operation Vulture, a wider initiative aimed at tackling persistent anti-social behaviour and theft in the area.

David Hodgson Smith, of Hudson Street, Burnley, appeared before Blackburn Magistrates' Court on Tuesday, July 29, where he admitted to three counts of theft. He was arrested on Monday, 28 July, on multiple shoplifting charges. Smith received a 16-week custodial sentence, suspended for 12 months. In addition, he was issued with a two-year Criminal Behaviour Order (CBO), restricting him from entering various retail premises across Burnley. As part of efforts to address the root causes of his offending, he has also been placed under a drug and alcohol rehabilitation programme.

In a separate but related case, Mark Tomlinson, who has no fixed address, was sentenced to 24 weeks in prison after being caught shoplifting again just a day after Smith's arrest. Tomlinson, who was already facing 18 charges of theft, also assaulted two police officers during his most recent arrest. He was sentenced on Wednesday, 30 July, at Blackburn Magistrates' Court after pleading guilty.

According to Lancashire Police, Tomlinson had been a known repeat offender, targeting several businesses, including Spar convenience stores, Pets at Home, Aldi, and multiple local service stations such as Rossendale Road, Barracks Road, and Kitchens. His persistent offending had become a serious concern for many traders in Burnley.

The recent arrests and prosecutions follow intensified policing efforts in Burnley town centre under the Safer Streets of Summer campaign. Officers have increased both visible and covert patrols, gathering intelligence and working closely with local businesses to identify and apprehend repeat offenders.

A spokesperson for Burnley and Padiham Police confirmed in a statement posted on social media that officers had been actively tackling retail crime in the town centre. "We have had increased town centre patrols who were both visible and in plain clothes, working with our businesses to tackle retail crime," the statement read. The operation included gathering intelligence, securing evidence, and engaging directly with local retailers to restore public confidence and deter further crime.

Police Sergeant Victoria Bramley of the Neighbourhood Policing Team emphasised the importance of a proactive approach to community policing. "We will continue to listen to our communities and deal with any issues raised. We want to send the message that any reports of shoplifting to the police will be investigated, and we will take positive action to support our local businesses and prevent reoffending," she said.

Sgt Bramley also noted the effectiveness of the current operation, highlighting a recent incident in which two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) detained yet another shoplifting suspect in the town centre. “He is on the way to custody to join another whom (sic) we arrested earlier and will be dealt with in due course,” she added.

The combined efforts of police and local traders under Operation Vulture aim to improve safety and restore order in the town centre. In addition to arrests, the police presence has included outreach activities such as community engagement through a mobile police station, involvement of police cadets, and mounted patrols.