

Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association

Week ending 21st January 2021

Cheshire News & Appeals



Latest Cheshire News

Leon Cullen pleads guilty to firearm, ammunition and drug offences

The head of an organised crime group in Warrington has pleaded guilty to firearm and drug offences. Leon Cullen, previously of Honister Avenue in Orford, admitted to conspiracy to supply firearms, conspiracy to possess ammunition and firearms and conspiracy to supply cocaine at Liverpool Crown Court today (Friday 19 March). The 33-year-old became one of Cheshire Constabulary's most wanted men when he fled the country on 10 January 2018. The same time his deputy twin brother Anthony and 19 of their associates were arrested following warrants executed by detectives from the Serious and Organised Crime Unit (SOCU). A year later Cullen's organised crime group were jailed for a total of 185 years - Anthony was given a 27 year sentence. The influential organised crime group instilled fear and intimidation into the local community in Warrington. The criminal gang were at or very near 'the top of the tree' in the scale of their drug dealing – made large cash profits as they supplied cocaine and cannabis in Warrington, Winsford and Bangor. It is also believed that they had links with the North East. Their supply of illegal drugs raked in up to £290,000 profit per month, and was 'risky and often nasty' as Anthony, along with Chris Houghton, Sean Ryan, Jason Eastens and Michael Mason, began using firearms to protect themselves and intimidate others. In total Cheshire Constabulary seized 3 ¼kg of cocaine and £205,680.00 in cash during the 18-month investigation - codenamed Operation Samurai. Cullen and his associates are believed to have supplied over 50kg of cocaine across the North West. Five guns including ammunition were recovered hidden in the loft of an address on Rylands Drive, Warrington. A further gun was found along with two bullets in a wicker basket at the foot of a bed to be immediately available if needed. They included a functioning AK-series rifle, a pump-action shotgun, automatic pistols and revolvers as well as a silencer to be fitted to one of the automatic handguns. The guns were used to threaten rival drug dealing gangs and scare those who owed money and were also made available for hire, loan or sale to other criminals. An international manhunt led to Cullen being detained in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on 3 January 2020. He was extradited and brought back to Cheshire on 19 February 2021. Cullen will be sentenced at Liverpool Crown Court on 14 May 2021.

Widnes man who committed two business burglaries and spat in officer's face jailed

A man from Widnes who committed burglaries at two businesses in the town has been jailed. Christopher Dennett, of Bower Street, broke into a members' only social club on Victoria Road in Widnes in the early hours of Tuesday 4 June 2019 and stole a small quantity of cash from the till and from a tips jar behind the bar. The 40-year-old also attempted to break into gaming machines and gain entry to a flat above the club. He was disturbed and fled on foot. A few months later Dennett broke into a sports store in Albert Square Shopping Centre, Widnes, and stole items worth a total of more than £3,500. Officers searching the area following the burglary, which was committed in the early hours of Thursday 22 August 2019, spotted a number of the items outside a flat in Dean Street. Dennett was inside the flat. He was wearing the clothes he had on during the burglary, which was captured on CCTV footage. An officer identified Dennett from the footage. He was arrested, and whilst detained he spat in a police constable's



face. The items Dennett stole from the sports store were all recovered, and his DNA was found on a screwdriver and an empty drink bottle that he left behind at the members' only social club that he burgled. He was subsequently charged with two counts of burglary and assaulting an emergency service worker. Dennett pleaded guilty to the offences and was sentenced at Liverpool Crown Court on Tuesday 16 March. He was jailed for two years and 10 months and ordered to pay a £170 victim surcharge. Following the sentencing, DS Gary McClatchey, of Widnes Local Policing Unit, said: *"When we interviewed Christopher Dennett in custody he admitted spitting in the female officer's face and accepted that his behaviour had been disgusting. However, he initially denied being responsible for the burglaries at the social club and the sports store. His stance changed when he became aware of the full extent of the evidence that we managed to gather against him. Dennett ended up pleading guilty to the offences. He is now behind bars facing the consequences of his actions and I hope that this case deters others from committing similar offences. I also hope that it reassures the community that we take all burglaries, whether they are residential or business burglaries, extremely seriously and do all that we can to catch the offenders and secure convictions against them."*

Teenager found guilty of attempted murder after blinding a man in Nantwich hammer attack

A teenager has been convicted of attempted murder after a man was left blind following a hammer attack in Nantwich. The 17-year-old – who cannot be named for legal reasons – was today (Thursday 18 March) found guilty of the vicious assault following a three-week trial at Chester Crown Court. He is due to be sentenced on Tuesday 13 April at Chester Crown Court. The 40-year-old victim was repeatedly hit with the weapon up to 12 times in an attack which took place in the space of just two minutes inside a flat in Arnold Street. Following the assault the severely injured victim was left alone in a bedroom. He was only found four hours later after an anonymous call to the police. DI Claire Jesson, of Crewe CID, said: *"This was a truly horrific and distressing attack, which will stay with the victim, his family and the officers who attended the crime scene, for the rest of their lives. He was beaten so brutally that he was left unrecognisable and could only be identified by his tattoo – and then he was left alone in a room in severe pain with horrific injuries. I am pleased a jury has found the teenager guilty and justice has been served. However the victim's life has changed forever and he will continue to be on a long road to recovery and will never regain his sight. I commend my detectives who have worked tirelessly to secure this outcome on what was a complex investigation."*

The court heard that the incident took place on Sunday 26 July 2020. At 4.30pm the victim arrived at a flat in Arnold Street where he was subjected to the brutal attack that left his face covered in blood and severely swollen. The 17-year-old had been using the flat as a place to deal drugs and it is believed that a dispute had taken place between him and the victim over a debt. Immediately after the attack the teenager took a photo of the victim as he lay on the floor and then fled the property. He ran to a nearby address, called for a taxi and waited to be collected. Ten minutes after leaving the taxi he sent the photo he had taken of the victim to a contact on social media. Shortly before 5pm two women attended the flat and saw the badly beaten victim in the bedroom lying on the bed. He had a hammer underneath his feet and they tried to help him. At 8.20pm police received an anonymous call to say a man had been attacked and was in a bedroom. When they arrived they found the victim in the bedroom with severe injuries to his head and face – he could only be identified by a tattoo on his body. What followed was a meticulous investigation to review CCTV footage, forensic analysis and conduct house-to-house enquiries. This led to the 17-year-old being identified and a sustained manhunt led to his arrest in Gorton, Manchester, on 31 July. He had tried to burn the clothes he was wearing on the day of the incident but a jacket seized from his address had traces of the victim's blood

on it. The teenager was subsequently charged with attempted murder. A second man, aged 42, was found not guilty of attempted murder.

Online sex offender from Failsworth jailed for nine years

A man who attempted to sexually exploit a teenage girl through social media has been jailed. Christopher Edwards was sentenced at Liverpool Crown Court on Friday 12 March where he was jailed for nine years. The 37-year-old from Failsworth had earlier pleaded guilty to engaging in sexual communications with a child, attempting to meet a girl under the age of 16 following grooming and breaching a sexual risk order. The charges relate to social media activity between Sunday 1 November and Tuesday 22 December. Edwards groomed a teenager from Warrington, through social media. Edwards was well aware that the girl from Warrington he was grooming was only 14 years old, yet he still sent her a number of sexually explicit images and messages. In one of the messages he told the girl that he had booked a hotel room in Warrington and offered to pay her for sex. The victim reported the messages to Cheshire Constabulary. A warrant was subsequently arrested at Edwards' home in Failsworth on Friday 15 January and he was arrested. Following the sentencing, PC Hannah Barton, of Warrington Problem Solving Team, said: *"Christopher Edwards contacted his victim through social media and, despite being well aware that she was only 14 years old, he bombarded her with messages of a sexual nature. He even went as far as to book a hotel room in order for the pair to meet and said that he would pay her for sex. Thankfully, the victim contacted police before any meeting took place and an investigation was launched by the team here at Warrington, which ultimately led to Edwards' arrest and conviction. This case highlights the dangers of social media. I hope that it acts as a reminder for all parents and guardians to warn their children of the dangers of communicating with people via social media, to check that they are using it safely and to keep an eye out for any warning signs of sexual exploitation."*



Edwards was also ordered to serve an extended sentence of seven-and-a-half years on licence, which will begin upon his release from prison. For advice on identifying signs of sexual exploitation visit <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/caa/child-abuse/child-sexual-exploitation/>. To report a sexual offence call Cheshire Constabulary on 101. Information can also be given online at <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/ro/report> or anonymously via Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Child Exploitation Awareness Day 2021

A national awareness day to highlight child exploitation (CE) and how to spot the signs is being supported by Cheshire Constabulary, Cheshire's Police and Crime Commissioner and Cheshire's Community Safety Partnership. The day takes place on **Thursday March 18** and aims to highlight the issues surrounding CE, raise awareness of the signs, and encourage everyone to speak out against exploitation. Cheshire Constabulary has a fundamental duty to protect those who are most vulnerable within our communities. This national campaign provides the Constabulary along with partner agencies a crucial opportunity to raise awareness about the dangers, the signs and the indicators of abuse so that we can effectively safeguard children and bring to justice those who exploit them. **Child exploitation is a hidden crime and can happen in many different ways** including online, where young people are persuaded or forced to take part in sexual activity and where organised crime groups, exert their power to involve young people in their criminal activity. Child Exploitation Manager and Coordinator for the force, DS Zoe Bowden, said: *"Our child*

exploitation officers work hard all year round to protect children and to ensure the appropriate advice, support and safeguarding is in place for them. We would urge everyone to know and see the signs of CE and be a voice for those who may not be able to speak up for themselves. Local communities can help play their part and look out for their neighbours by knowing how to spot if someone is being coerced, exploited or taken advantage of. It is important to remember there is never one type of victim or offender and that child exploitation can happen to anyone. The impact this type of crime can have on a child is absolutely devastating and can have a long lasting and significant effect on all those involved.”

Police and Crime Commissioner, David Keane, said: *“Child exploitation targets some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. Victims can be manipulated and forced into something they do not want to do, often in return for attention, affection, money, drugs, alcohol or accommodation. Cheshire police work tirelessly to protect our young people from this abhorrent crime but we also need members of the community to support us by being able to recognise the common signs of CE and report any suspicions to protect young people across the county.”* Helen Brackenbury, Chair of the Community Safety Partnership said: *“National Child Exploitation Awareness Day is an important day to help raise awareness of the reality of child exploitation. It is important for us as a Community Safety Partnership to ensure that residents know the signs to look for and feel confident in reporting them. Recognising exploitation is hard, but if you know and see the signs, you can do something about it. If you need support, there are specially trained professionals who you can speak to for help. Visit the Know and See website for all the details on spotting the signs and for details on who to contact for support.”* There are various forms of exploitation that involves the manipulation and/or coercion of young people under the age of 18 into activities in exchange for things such as money, gifts, accommodation, affection or status. The manipulation or 'grooming' process involves befriending children, gaining their trust, and often supplying them with drugs and alcohol, sometimes over a long period of time.

Knowing these signs is key to helping to stop child exploitation:

- Unexplained injuries e.g. bruising
- Regularly using drugs or drinking alcohol
- Mood swings, aggression towards others
- Truancy or a drop in performance at school
- Self-harm – e.g. cutting or eating disorders
- Change in appearance, or borrowing clothes from others
- Always tired
- Unexplained relationships with older people
- Staying out late, not returning home
- They have unexplained gifts, expensive clothes, mobile phones
- Unexplained money, frequently taking part in activities requiring money
- Unknown vehicles dropping them off or picking them up
- Unknown friends on their social media sites
- Secretive phone calls and internet use

If you suspect someone is carrying out CE, that someone is being exploited, or that you have been a victim yourself, please report it to any of the authorities or the police on 101. In an emergency, dial 999. **For more information about the signs of child exploitation and for help and support, visit www.knowandsee.co.uk** You can also call the national anonymous CE helpline on 116 000

Five men plead guilty to drugs conspiracy that involved police seizing £20million of cocaine

Two brothers were the mainstream suppliers of drugs to two well-known gangs in Warrington that saw 186kg of cocaine being seized by police in Cheshire. Alan, 51, and John Tobin, 40, were supplying huge amounts of cocaine to Anthony Cullen, 33, and 30-year-old Jamie Oldroyd's organised crime gangs. They also instructed Jamie Simpson, 33, to deliver £20million of cocaine on their behalf from Kent to Warrington. John Tobin's DNA was found deposited on the bubble wrap of one of the drug blocks he watched being placed into boxes during the packing process – this was crucial in connecting him to the conspiracy. Detectives from the Serious and Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) seized the drugs on the M6 motorway on 2 August 2018 during an operation in which Simpson had been under surveillance. The brothers also sold cannabis, heroin, ketamine and cocaine to other gangs in Scotland, London, North Wales, Cornwall, West Yorkshire, Cumbria, Manchester and Humberside. While Alan and John were in command of the criminal enterprise, they required the assistance of Robbie Broughton, Simon Leech and Brian McQuillan to do the day-to-day running of their business. In order to distance themselves from having links to organised crime, they recruited 29-year-old Leech to act as a conduit, to minimise any direct contact made to them. Broughton's role, predominantly, was to collect cash from the organised crime leaders who had been supplied drugs by the Tobins. However, the 38-year-old also enforced debts and made threats on their behalf and informed the brothers of problems that were arising. Their large-scale commodity meant 51-year-old McQuillan was responsible for couriering large amounts of cash across the United Kingdom. The pair were ultimately running a smooth, and successfully profitable, criminal organisation until detectives from SOCU began three operations into their customers from 2016 to 2018. This involved targeting Lee Stoba, aged 47, Anthony Cullen and Jamie Oldroyd – codenamed Operation Bullfight, Operation Samurai and Operation Dreadnought respectively. During the course of the operation detectives witnessed John Tobin meeting with Cullen, Broughton and Robert Bibby at a countryside café, where they discussed the supply of drugs. Alan Tobin was also observed meeting with Jamie Oldroyd and Jamie Simpson at a café in Warrington to talk over the onward supply of class A drugs to organised crime gangs in Carlisle, Liverpool, Scunthorpe and Sussex. The operations led to large amounts of drugs and money being seized by police and resulted in debts owed to the Tobin brothers that were too big for the day-to-day employees to deal with. This led to the Tobins having to become more hands on and, on one occasion, Alan was seen meeting with Cullen at a pub car park in Warrington where a heated argument took place between them.

Their criminality drew to a close on Wednesday 9 September 2020 after detectives executed a number of warrants in Widnes, Warrington and St Helens. All of the men were arrested and subsequently charged. DCI Mike Evans, from the Serious and Organised Crime Unit, said: *"Taking down the mainstream supplier of drugs to three big organised crime groups operating in Warrington was the final piece of the jigsaw. The brothers sat at the very top of the chain. They were provided with greater protection to prevent them from being identified as leaders of the organised crime group. At first they sat back and reaped the rewards of their criminality by displaying a lavish lifestyle while employing Broughton, Leech and McQuillan to run the business. For a while their criminal enterprise was seen to be getting bigger and bigger until we began running a number of operations on the gangs they were supplying drugs to. Once we started seizing large quantities of drugs and cash, problems arose, and the Tobin's soon began to surface, as huge debts were owed. The colossal seizure of 186kg of cocaine saw their reputation ruined. The investigation team has worked relentlessly to collate evidence that shows the brothers' involvement in these conspiracies over a period of up to nine years. Their hard work and determination has paid dividends and resulted in five guilty pleas and justice finally catching up with them all."*

David Keane, Police and Crime Commissioner for Cheshire, added: *"This an enormous achievement in Cheshire's fight against those involved in serious and organised crime. The sheer hard work, determination and successful results over many years to get to this point is commendable and testament to how hard officers work to protect the communities they serve."*

Latest Cheshire Appeals

Police are appealing for help in finding missing man from Warrington

Police are appealing for help in finding a missing 22-year-old man from Warrington. Dillon O'Brian was last seen at 3am on 20 March in Bewsey and Whitecross, Warrington. He is described as white, 5ft 5ins tall, with dark hair and facial hair. He was last seen wearing a black hat, pale blue jacket, jeans and black trainers. He has links to the Widnes or Runcorn area and the local canal networks. Inspector Neil Anson said: *"We have been making numerous enquiries to trace Dillon, including using our specialist search officers, the drone, search dogs and Cheshire Search and Rescue. We are becoming increasingly concerned for his welfare, as are his family. Contact us on 101 if you see him so that we can make sure that he is safe."* Anyone with information should contact Cheshire Police on 101 quoting IML 942867.



Police in Northwich appeal for information following aggravated burglary

Police are appealing for witnesses following an aggravated burglary in Weaverham. Around 7.40pm on Friday 19th March a man has entered an address in Walnut Avenue and demanded keys to the car on the driveway. The man threatened the victim with what is believed to be an air pistol. The victim and his partner managed to remove the offender from the premises and call police. Following the incident a search was made of the area, but the suspect was not located and enquires have been continuing to trace him. DC James Elliott said: *"This was obviously a shocking ordeal for the couple but they thankfully weren't injured during the incident. I'd like to reassure residents that we have been making numerous enquiries in order to identify the suspect and are maintaining a presence in the area. I'd like to take the opportunity to remind people to lock their doors and keep valuables out of sight - report any suspicious activity to police and review your CCTV if you have it. We're particularly keen to hear from anyone who may have doorbell or CCTV footage of any suspicious activity in the Weaverham area between 7pm and 8pm, so I'd urge you to check cameras between those times that evening."* Anyone with information should contact police on 101 or via the [website](#) quoting IML 942524. Alternatively information can be passed anonymously by contacting Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Appeal for information following serious assault in Widnes

Police are appealing for witnesses and CCTV footage after a woman was assaulted outside her home in Widnes. At around 8.30pm on Wednesday 17 March the 37-year-old heard a knock on her door in Downside. Upon answering it the woman was threatened by an unknown man. He then slashed her across the face with a knife before fleeing the area on foot. The man is described as young, white and around 6' tall. He had an athletic build, was clean shaven and had fair hair and blue eyes. The offender was wearing a long-sleeved top and navy blue trainers. The victim sustained a serious facial injury as a result of the incident that required surgery. She is currently recovering in hospital. Enquiries in relation to the incident are ongoing and detectives are urging anyone who may be able to aid their investigation to come forward. DS Roberts, of Widnes Local Policing Unit, said: *"The victim sustained a serious facial injury as a result of the attack and we are committed to doing all we can to trace the man responsible. We are keen to hear from anyone who was in the area at the time and witnessed anything that may be relevant to our investigation. Perhaps you witnessed the incident or saw the offender. I also want to hear from anyone with any CCTV or dashcam*

footage which may help our investigation. If you don't want to speak directly to police, information can be reported to Crimestoppers anonymously."

Anyone with any information or footage in relation to the incident is asked to call Cheshire Constabulary on 101, quoting IML 940914, or visit <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/ro/report>. Alternatively, contact Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111 or via <https://crimestoppers-uk.org/give-information/forms/give-information-anonymously>.

Police appeal for information following a suspicious incident in Alsager

Police are appealing for information following a suspicious incident in Alsager. At around 3.15pm on Thursday 18 March a 12-year-old boy was walking along a track just off Lodge Road and Sandbach Road North when he was approached by a man. The man put his arms out, alarming the boy, who pushed past him and ran off to safety. The man is described as tall, slim and in his 50s with green/brown eyes. He was wearing a black beanie hat and a black snood, a grey patchy shirt and a grey patchy zip up hoody. The patches were described as possibly rips. He was also wearing brown cargo type trousers. DC Gail Burndred said: *"The man didn't say anything to the boy but his actions clearly alarmed him and he did the right thing by telling an adult who then reported it to police. We want to reassure you that we are making a number of enquiries to locate the man. We have been patrolling in the area and will continue to do so, and we are linking in with the local schools to give advice and support to parents and children."* Anyone who sees suspicious activity should contact police on 101." If you have any information please call police on 101 or go to [our website](#) quoting IML 941529.

Appeal following robbery incident at newsagent in Widnes

Detectives investigating an attempted robbery in Widnes are appealing for information and footage from members of the public. The incident occurred at a newsagent on Victoria Road at around 9.15pm on Monday 15 March. Two teenage boys entered the store wearing face coverings and dark clothing. One of them brandished a hammer and demanded alcohol from a man working behind the counter. The man challenged the boys, who then fled the shop empty-handed. They ran off towards Ashley Way. Another teenage boy who was stood outside during the incident ran off in the opposite direction, towards Kingsway. He was also wearing dark clothing and a face covering. The two teenagers who entered the store were both white. The boy who brandished a hammer and demanded alcohol was wearing a black puffer jacket and black pants. He was carrying a black bag around his neck and spoke with a local accent. Enquiries in relation to the incident are ongoing and detectives are urging anyone with any information or footage that may aid their investigation to get in touch. DC Anthony Evans, of Widnes CID, said: *"This was a frightening incident that understandably left the man who was working at the shop shaken up. There were no customers in the shop at the time of the attempted robbery. It is believed to be an isolated incident and we are determined to establish the identities of the teenage boys and deal with them accordingly. Enquiries are ongoing and I urge anyone who was in the Victoria Road area of the town centre around the time of the incident to contact us at Widnes Police Station if they saw anything that may help our investigation. The same goes for anyone who thinks they may know who the teenage boys are, or have CCTV or dashcam footage of them."*

Anyone with information or footage that may be relevant to the investigation should call Cheshire Constabulary on 101, quoting IML 939444, give the details via <https://www.cheshire.police.uk/ro/report> or contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Latest Cheshire Wanted

Runcorn man wanted on recall to prison

Police are asking the public to help them trace a man from Runcorn who is wanted on recall to prison. Michael Molden is believed to be in Runcorn, though he also has links to Widnes. The 34-year-old is white and around 6' 2" tall with a slim build. He has short blond hair and blue eyes. Anyone who sees Molden or has information regarding his whereabouts is asked to call Cheshire Constabulary immediately on 101, quoting IML 875335. Alternatively, information can be given anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.



To find out further information about the Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Association, to log into your account or for Cheshire Neighbourhood Watch Literature please visit our website: <http://cheshire.ourwatch.org.uk/>