

Energy Theft and Organised Crime

A few months ago, Leicestershire Police and Western Power Distribution approached British Gas with an opportunity to investigate a high-profile businessman in the area. The initial ask was a relatively simple one – review a few accounts where they believed illegal interference of the electricity supplies had taken place. However, the investigation soon grew legs and became a much larger collaborative investigation.

Teams from multiple police units, Local Housing, the Fire Service, Vulnerable People support teams, and many of our officers came together to investigate almost 70 supplies that were linked to the suspect.

Many of the properties were found to be illegal HMOs, overcrowded and unsafe, with dozens of people living in shocking conditions. And then, perhaps to be expected by this point, the cannabis farms began to surface.

Unfortunately, Illegal housing and cannabis farms tend to go hand in hand with energy theft, and as each of the supplies were checked we identified 27 of them to have been tampered with! 21 of the tampers were found across residential properties, the remaining 6 being within commercial sites, with a loss of over £200,000 due to energy theft.

It quickly became evident that the suspect has links to people with an extensive knowledge of our industry, as there were a variety of tamper types, but the most common by far were illegal supplies. Typically, the legitimate meters had been moved outside, running one or two small appliances to keep them ticking over, with everything else running off the illegal supplies.

More worryingly it seems whoever installed the supplies wasn't too safety conscious as the gas supplies were connected without regulators, feeding mains pressure to the appliances! Naturally every tampered meter and supply have been made safe, and support is being given to the tenants of the illegal HMOs, who were innocent victims of the suspect.

For the Police this is just the start of their long journey towards prosecution. It's not a simple case, with energy theft being the tip of an organised crime iceberg there's clearly a lot more work to do. However, confidence is high and we're looking forward to sharing future updates as time goes on!

