

West Yorkshire MAG's Plan for Reducing Motorcycle-Related Crime



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Introduction

The three West Yorkshire branches of the Motorcycle Action Group represent the interests of thousands of motorcyclists across the county. Motorcycle theft is our members' highest concern. West Yorkshire consistently has the highest rate of motorcycle theft in England outside Greater London. Despite recent falls three motorcycles per day were stolen in Leeds and Bradford in 2023. Between 2017 – 2023 just 15 cases or 0.21% resulted in any form of resolution.

Statistics for the number of motorcycles stolen are difficult to obtain because they are aggregated into a generic "Theft of Motor Vehicles" category. Many vehicles are stolen by members of organised gangs who are involved with other types of serious crime. Theft and related offences have serious implications for community cohesion and Leeds' vision of making the city somewhere where you don't need a car. Thieves do not care about the difference between a motorcycle, e-bike or even a desirable pedal cycle as long as it is worth stealing.

In 2023 we held a meeting with the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime to discuss motorcycle-related crime. She encouraged us to develop three "Big Asks". These are:

1. **Data:** Develop better data recording and reporting at local level whilst joining MAG in calling for the Home Office to introduce Theft of Motorcycle as a new offence code. At local level the ideal would be for them to publish the motorcycle specific theft, arrest and prosecution stats without us needing to go through FOIA process.
2. **Prioritisation:** Make motorcycle theft figures a key performance indicator for the force that is consistently measured and publicly reported
3. **Prevention:** Work with MAG to call for improved secure parking facilities and support/funding to expand Bumpy or similar charities. Address the root causes of motorcycle-theft and related crime through a multi-agency approach

This document provides some ideas on how to do this. We therefore look forward to the 2024-28 Policing and Crime Plan placing a greater emphasis on reducing motorcycle-related crime.

What is Motorcycle-Related Crime?

For the purpose of this document “motorcycle” refers to any form of powered two-wheel vehicle including scooters, mopeds, petrol motorcycles and electrically propelled motorcycles.

Between 2004 and 2022 the number of fatalities¹ involving motorcycles in Great Britain fell by 40% and serious injuries fell by 35%. This is against a 10% fall in motorcycle use. The effects of road safety initiatives such as Vision Zero are therefore starting to come through. It means that resources can be focussed on more serious motorcycle-related crime.

The types of crime that we are concerned in particular are related to motorcycle theft. about cover a number of offences related to motorcycle theft. It would be a mistake to dismiss it as merely a property crime. These offences include:

1. Motorcycle theft
2. Theft of other types of two-wheeled vehicle such as pedal cycles and e-bikes
3. Bike jacking
4. Bag and mobile phone snatching
5. Drug offences including county lines
6. Burglary
7. Deaths or serious injured caused by stolen motorcycles, particularly involving innocent bystanders
8. Antisocial behaviour and riding

They have implications for community coherence. Motorcycle theft is often carried out by organised gangs. We are concerned that a reactive approach to handling motorcycle-related crime does not have a deterrent effect and we would urge the Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime (DMPC) to develop a more proactive approach.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-motorcyclist-factsheet-2022/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-motorcyclist-factsheet-2022>

How Much of a Problem Is Motorcycle-Related Crime?

Official figures on motorcycle theft are very difficult to obtain. Data sets from the Office of National Statistics² list vehicle-related crime as “Theft of Motor Vehicles” but do not break it down into the type of vehicle. They include security precautions on cars and vans only and do not give details for other vehicles. Appendix tables for crime in England and Wales³ also combine motorcycles with other motor vehicles. They do have a separate category for bicycle theft despite this being much lower than motor vehicle theft. We are concerned that these statistics do not provide enough information to make meaningful decisions and hope that the Home Office will be asked to improve them.

As a result we carry out our own research using Freedom of Information Act requests. We have detailed statistics for thefts in the Leeds and Bradford police divisions and summary statistics for a number of police forces including West Yorkshire. Leeds and Bradford had the following number of thefts between 2017 – 2023:

Year	Bradford	Leeds	Total
2017	494	737	1231
2018	369	746	1115
2019	414	630	1044
2020	276	420	696
2021	247	542	789
2022	409	812	1221
2023	348	647	995

The decrease from 2022 to 2023 is encouraging and we hope it will continue into 2024. However it still means that an average of three motorcycles *a day* were stolen in Leeds and Bradford alone.

The main postcode areas and type of location for motorcycle theft are listed in the appendix. Reports of motorcycle theft are particularly high in the LS14, LS9 and LS10 postcode areas. Houses, streets and open air car parks are the most common type of location.

Research carried out by MAG in 2022⁴ found that motorcycles were 16 times more likely to be stolen than cars in West Yorkshire. Greater Manchester and West Midlands did not respond to MAG’s Freedom of Information request and hence West Yorkshire had the greatest number of motorcycle thefts in England and Wales outside Greater London.

The prosecution rate for motorcycle theft is extremely low. We found that 90% of all reports of motorcycles being reported as stolen in Leeds and Bradford between 2017 – 2023 did not result in further action. 3% of cases led to a charge or summons and just 0.21% led to any kind of resolution. This is 15 cases out of a total of 7091. The remaining cases were listed as ongoing at the time the figures were compiled. The percent of motorcycles recovered over this time was 48.8%.

Priority One – Keeping People Safe

In the context of this document we take “safety” to mean keeping people safe from crime, rather than road safety initiatives such as Vision Zero. A disproportionate number of road traffic collisions where

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/natureofcrimevehiclerelatedtheft>

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<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/datasets/crimeinenglandandwalesappendixtables>

4 <https://mag-uk.org/new-report-shows-motorcyclists-face-disproportionate-risk-of-theft/>

people are killed or seriously injured involve stolen motorcycles. Reducing motorcycle related crime would therefore help to improve road safety.

Our members have expressed concerns about personal safety when riding through high crime areas such as Seacroft in Leeds and the Holmewood estate in Bradford. Some female riders actively avoid these areas because they feel they are at risk of being “bike-jacked”. Improving personal safety in these areas would fit with the cross-cutting theme of reducing violence against women and girls.

Leeds has a vision of being somewhere where you don’t need a car. One of the barriers is the fear of alternative forms of transport being stolen. This includes motorcycles but also pedal cycles and e-bikes. The Leeds City bike hire scheme has been badly affected by theft and vandalism.

The DMPC may wish to investigate whether reducing the rate of motorcycle theft would encourage minority groups to switch to motorcycles as an alternative to private cars, in line with the cross-cutting theme of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

E-bikes and e-scooters are currently illegal to use on public roads under nearly all circumstances. Electric motorcycles such as Sur-Rons have a reputation of being used *only* for illegal purposes such as drug dealing. Their use by untrained riders puts innocent bystanders at risk. Any plans to legalise them would need a system of registration, insurance and licensing in the same manner

Domestic CCTV is often rejected due to not being of sufficient quality to provide useful evidence. The police could work with CCTV manufacturers to produce an accreditation mark and instructions.

The West Yorkshire road network is currently undergoing major changes. Reducing the number of roads that motorcycles can use means they may be forced to go through higher crime areas. Segregated cycle lanes provide convenient escape routes for thieves where cars cannot follow them. Motorcycles are often lumped in with cars in traffic planning. We would like planners to include the possibility of two-wheeled vehicle crime (including pedal cycles) as part of their criteria and to find ways to prevent it through design.

A large number of secure motorcycle parking spaces have been removed in recent years. A scheme⁵ to install secure parking at a number of car parks outside Leeds city centre was signed off in 2021 but never implemented. Providing secure parking in sensible locations that is free to use would encourage riders not to use less appropriate places where they are more likely to be stolen.

We also have concerns about the ease of purchasing power tools such as battery-powered angle grinders. These are inexpensive and readily available from supermarkets. We would like to see the sale of these restricted in the same way as knives and other items that could be used to commit crimes.

The systemic causes of motorcycle-related crime are dealt with under Priority Two. Preventing individual cases of theft and the type of related crimes that fall outside the scope of Vision Zero would help to keep people safe.

Priority Two- Safer Places and Thriving Communities

The consultation states that “it will tackle the place-based crime that damages people’s everyday lives, including burglary and Neighbourhood Crime, anti-social behaviour, and dangerous driving and speeding.” A priority for national government is reducing antisocial motorcycle use. These often involve organised gangs with social media accounts where they show off what they have stolen. They are often involved with other forms of serious crime including drugs and burglary. They have links to gangs in other parts of the country and it is not unknown for stolen vehicles to be seized some distance away from where they were taken.

Discouraging young men and boys from joining these gangs would support the “Effective response to Men and Boys who are Victims” and “children and young people” cross-cutting themes. It would need to

⁵ <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=54153>

take a carrot and stick approach. Obtaining a legal motorcycle licence is expensive and takes a long time. The DMPC could encourage the Department for Transport to simplify the licensing regime. Charities such as the Bumpy Project⁶ in Birstall give young people a chance to get involved with motorcycles in a safe environment.

Dissuading people from joining gangs would need a multi-agency approach including education, the justice system, and possibly using anti-social behaviour clauses in tenancy agreements. We hope the DMPC will work with these agencies to develop such an approach.

Motorcycle-related crime is a symptom of a wider problem. Glasgow successfully reduced knife crime by treating it as a public health issue. West Yorkshire Police developed the Clear. Hold, Build framework for dealing with certain types of organised crime. We would like to see motorcycle-related crime included in these initiatives as a matter of routine rather than by having sporadic crackdowns.

Care needs to be taken to ensure action to curb antisocial riding does not inadvertently affect legal group rides such as charity or memorial runs. The issue is not groups of motorcycles per se but their illegal use to deliberately cause alarm

We would also like to see the police engage more with motorcycle groups. It would help to reduce the perception that the police do not appear to theft seriously. The West Yorkshire MAG groups had a meeting with the DMPC in 2023 and we would like to arrange a follow-up. We have also had meetings with specialist motorcycle police units. However we find that individual officers get reassigned and teams get reorganised. This means that any continuity is lost and we have to rebuild our contacts. A good place to hold regular events would be Squires Bikers' Café in Sherburn in Elmet. Although this is just over the border in North Yorkshire it is extremely popular with riders across the region. There could be joint events with North Yorkshire police.

Motorcyclists have the lowest engagement rate with Operation Snap out of all forms of transport. Informal discussions among our members suggest they do not wish to implicate themselves. There is also some scepticism about whether any action would be taken for footage of riders with no helmets or number plates on obviously stolen motorcycles.

Initiatives such as Operations Dieselcrest, Badgeland or Steerpike tend to be short-lived or restricted to a single police division. A county-wide or even national standing operation with a static point of contact and a prominent social media presence would be a good way to coordinate actions against this form of organised crime.

A high profile publicity campaign would help to improve the image of how the police handle motorcycle-related crime. Placing a poster in every motorcycle dealership in the county would give the police a chance to develop a relationship with the motorcycle trade. There could be explainers about the criteria used for tactical stops or why a police car going past someone riding with no helmet does not attempt to apprehend them. It would help to reassure people that their concerns are being taken seriously and hopefully discourage theft and antisocial riding.

Ultimately we would like motorcycle theft and joining associated gangs to be as socially unacceptable as drink driving or drug dealing. We would encourage the Mayor to work with all agencies to find deterrents that are more effective and better value for money than short custodial sentences.

Priority Three- Supporting Victims and Witnesses

Motorcycle theft is not a victimless crime. Every stolen motorcycle has a rightful owner. They have had a valuable possession taken from them, possibly in violent circumstances. Their motorcycle might be their primary means of transport. It might be part of their identity. There will definitely be financial and

⁶ <https://www.bumpy.org.uk/>

personal repercussions. Often the case is closed very quickly after being given a crime number and they are left to deal with their insurance company.

When stolen motorcycles are recovered the victim is usually expected to pay a recovery fee. On top of other costs this can be substantial. If their insurance company retains the vehicle they may have had to pay a large amount of money for something they never see again.

We ask that post-theft processes are reviewed to be more sympathetic to victims and to ensure that potentially valuable information is not lost. We understand that the police cannot give details for operational reasons but acknowledging the help of victims and witnesses in securing convictions would provide some sense of closure. Holding cases open for a little longer or reopening them if new evidence becomes available would help to reduce the high percent that are closed without further action being taken. It might also help to improve the charge rate. The police force with the highest charging rate for theft of motor vehicles is Dyfed Powys. Their rate is 13.1%. West Yorkshire's is 2.64%. They may wish to work together to find out how to improve this.

The 101 system is staffed by 999 operators who obviously have to deal with emergency calls as well. A web form, email address, voicemail or text message service could capture information that is not time-critical. There could be a specific contact number for motorcycle-related crime that goes straight to specialist teams as part of the standing operation mentioned earlier. We hope this information will be shared across the county as the mobile nature of motorcycles means that they do not usually remain in one police division.

National government has recently begun a consultation⁷ into improving motor vehicle insurance. We hope the DMPC will pass on to the experience of victims to this consultation. In our experience vehicle insurance is often not particularly consumer-friendly. Because it is a legal requirement to hold it there is sometimes a feeling that they will get their money regardless of how poor their customer service is.

Overall the experience of victims and witnesses could be improved by reviewing processes and having all levels of the police listen to what they have to say.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ministers-bring-together-industry-experts-and-consumer-champions-to-tackle-spiralling-costs-for-drivers>

Conclusion

This consultation provides a valuable opportunity to reset the approach taken in dealing with motorcycle-related crime. Following the 2024 general election a number of senior government ministers have West Yorkshire seats including the Home Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. We look forward to being involved with developing a scheme to reduce the rate and root causes of motorcycle-related crime in support of the national priority of reducing antisocial vehicle use.

An electronic copy of this document, an executive summary and the statistics used in the appendix available from the Yorkshire MAG website at <https://yorkshire.mag-uk.org/west-yorkshire-mags-theft-plan/> or <https://bit.ly/WYMAGTheft>.

Contacts

Contact details for local West Yorkshire MAG personnel are as follows:

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Appendix

These statistics are taken from <https://mag-uk.org/new-report-shows-motorcyclists-face-disproportionate-risk-of-theft/> on the MAG website and data from aggregated Freedom of Information Act requests which can be found on the Yorkshire MAG website at <https://yorkshire.mag-uk.org/west-yorkshire-mags-theft-plan/> or <https://bit.ly/WYMAGTheft>.

Motorcycle Thefts in Leeds and Bradford By Year

Year	Count
2017	1231
2018	1115
2019	1044
2020	696
2021	789
2022	1221
2023	995

Top15 Motorcycle Thefts in Leeds and Bradford between 2017-2023 by Postcode Outward Code

Postcode	Count
(blank)	2064
LS14	289
LS9	265
LS10	235
LS15	211
BD4	210
LS12	182
LS6	167
Not recorded	164
LS11	157
LS1	144
LS8	140
LS2	137
LS13	134
BD22	131

Top 10 Motorcycle Thefts in Leeds and Bradford Between 2017-2023 by Location Identifier

Location Identifier	Count
House	2247
Street/Road	1374
Not Recorded	1019
Not Stated	619
Car Park (Open Air)	400
Flat	158
Shed (Garden Shed)	145
Outbuilding - Other	103
Other (Dwelling)	83

Other (Commercial)	81
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Outcome of Motorcycle Theft Cases in Leeds And Bradford Between 2017-2023

Outcome	Count
18. Investigation complete: No suspect ID	5578
15. Evidential difficulties: Suspect ID	696
0. Ongoing	423
1. Charge/Summons	225
16. Evidential difficulties: Suspect ID (Victim based)	115
14. Evidential difficulties: No suspect ID (Victim based)	28
8. Community Resolution	8
17. Prosecution time limit expired	7
2. Youth Caution	3
3. Adult Caution	2
12. Prosecution prevented: Suspect too ill	2
21. Further investigation not in public interest	2
22. Diversionary, educational or intervention	1
20. Action undertaken by another body/agency	1