

Scheme to tackle shoplifting flops

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A bid to tackle shoplifting and anti-social behaviour has flopped as Ashford and Weald Partnership Against Crime has withdrawn from Tenterden Watch.

The scheme, through which shops and pubs communicate via radio to combat low-level crime has failed to attract support from businesses in the town, despite Tenterden Town Council agreeing to subsidise the cost of it.

It is successful in Ashford where there are around 75 ShopWatch and PubWatch members, who communicate concerns about suspicious behaviour on the organisation's intelligence-sharing website, where they file reports or share images.

Backed by Ashford Monitoring Centre, which oversees the radio system and provides CCTV support, businesses in the day and night time economy are able to call on police back up to tackle incidents.

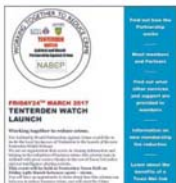
Tenterden Watch was launched in March when shops and pubs were extensively leafleted, but despite high expectations of success it did not take off.

Rebecca Molloy crime manager of the Ashford and Weald Partnership Against Crime, confirmed that it had cancelled the roll out for Tenterden. She said: "It's a little disappointing that Tenterden Watch has failed to take off. The idea was first muted around five years ago and people have lost interest down the line.

"Businesses have closed in Tenterden and perhaps the bistros, cafes and independent shops wouldn't necessarily have wanted to fund it."

She added: "With no police station in Tenterden it also makes it harder to establish the scheme."

Members pay £364 annually to be covered and Tenterden Town Council (TTC) had offered to contribute £100 towards each membership fee,



The invitation to the meeting aimed at setting up a Tenterden Watch system to stop business crime and right, Rebecca Molloy

up to a maximum of £4,000 for businesses that signed up. Mrs Molloy said that TTC had been "helpful and understanding" in its approach, but to no avail.

A radio repeater linking Tenterden and Ashford, which sits on the top of the town hall had previously been installed at the cost of around £4,000 and a broadband link established costing £1,600, but Miss Molloy said that the partnership could not continue to fund the link.

Only one shopkeeper turned up to the launch meeting in March at the town hall, despite Miss Molloy assembling a team of Tenterden and Ashford borough councillors, police officers, Right Guard Security staff and Ashford and Weald Partnership Against Crime representatives.

The sole retail attendee, Paula Ellis of Between the Lines in Sayers Lane, described the lack of response at the time as "shocking", adding: "Every week we have shoplifters and I don't believe that we are the only shop in Tenterden that

is targeted. We have had hundreds of pounds worth of cards stolen. It looks like shops in Tenterden don't care about the problem.

"I can't just use one radio and talk to myself and I think we need at least half the shops in Tenterden to sign up to make it a success."

Tara McCarraher owner of Rising Star in Tenterden High Street, said that Tenterden's close-knit community meant there was already an informal network in place to tackle crime. She said: "We all have CCTV in the shops and we contact each other if anything has happened and go through CCTV images if there are repeat offenders. Tenterden is a small community, not a big place like Ashford so we are already in close contact."

■ Miss Molloy is set to leave her position as crime manager for the partnership this month to take up a new post in Croydon, with her replacement yet to be announced.