# MPs condemn Apple and Google for failing to curb £20m mobile phone theft epidemic



MPs have voiced serious concerns that tech giants Apple and Google are inadvertently profiting from the burgeoning landscape of mobile phone theft, a crime increasingly attributed to sophisticated organised crime networks operating across the UK, Algeria, and China. This claim comes amid alarming statistics: in 2024, 80,000 mobile devices were reported stolen in London alone, marking a 25% surge from the previous year's 64,000 incidents, with iPhones predominating the list of stolen devices. The estimated street value of these thefts stands around £20 million, prompting urgent calls for action from law enforcement officials.

During a recent session of the House of Commons science and technology committee, the Metropolitan Police highlighted the need for smartphone manufacturers to implement measures that prevent stolen devices from accessing their cloud services. This, they argue, would render these devices significantly less valuable on the black market. Darren Scates, the Met’s chief digital data and technology officer, stated that despite discussions on this issue since 2023, neither Apple nor Google has taken meaningful steps to address these concerns.

Martin Wrigley, a Liberal Democrat member of the committee, expressed frustration, urging the tech companies to act decisively: “You owe it to the customers around the world to implement this immediately. No ifs, no buts, just do it.” However, representatives from both companies have defended their current security measures. Simon Wingrove, a software engineering manager at Google, remarked that their system is both robust and effective, while Gary Davis, a senior director at Apple, argued that disconnections could facilitate fraud, further complicating the issue.

Critics of the tech companies, including former Conservative policing minister Kit Malthouse, suggested that there appears to be an ongoing commercial incentive for Apple and Google to maintain their current profit margins, despite the apparent ethical implications. Malthouse noted that yearly losses of £50 million in stolen phones in London could reflect both a direct loss to the companies and a potential market erosion for future sales. Davis countered these claims, asserting that Apple does not profit from the misfortunes of users and emphasising the substantial investments the company has made in security features.

Recent data suggests that the rising tide of thefts has not gone unnoticed. According to a survey by the fintech start-up Nuke From Orbit, nearly 29% of UK adults reported experiencing mobile phone theft, a significant jump from 17% in 2023. This alarming trend underscores growing concerns about digital security and personal safety, as many users remain at risk by not adopting basic security measures such as updating passwords or avoiding the reuse of personal identification numbers.

The police have acknowledged a slight decline in overall thefts in recent months — down 15% in April and May — which they hope might indicate a greater awareness among the public and increased police focus. However, Commander James Conway described theft as an “easy crime to commit,” remarking on the tactics employed by thieves who use high-powered e-bikes to swiftly steal and distribute devices, often making recovery challenging for law enforcement.

In response to the heightened crime rates, the UK government is seeking to introduce new legislation aimed at streamlining police responses to mobile phone thefts, including amended powers that allow officers to access data from phone tracking apps without traditional warrants. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper highlighted the frustrations faced by victims when their stolen devices are located yet remain unclaimed due to procedural delays.

In this context, the ongoing discussions among MPs, police authorities, and tech companies have gained critical importance as they seek to forge cooperative strategies to mitigate the effects of this escalated criminality. The stark realities of rising theft numbers, coupled with an awareness of the potential for digital solutions, suggest that the time for decisive action against this pervasive issue may well be upon us.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/03/mps-apple-google-phone-thefts-london), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/03/mps-apple-google-phone-thefts-london)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/03/mps-apple-google-phone-thefts-london), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/ca66ff06-860a-428c-9fc4-b5a0fd2412be)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.ft.com/content/0973bd8d-07b5-47ad-8133-47240352e1eb), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/d3c7a022-3fdc-4087-a399-ba1d8cfc0c4f)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-seizes-one-thousand-stolen-phones-in-a-week-493558), [[7]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-hosts-summit-on-mobile-phone-theft)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/03/mps-apple-google-phone-thefts-london> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2025/jun/03/mps-apple-google-phone-thefts-london> - MPs have accused Apple and Google of profiting from multimillion-pound phone-snatching operations orchestrated by organised crime gangs in Britain, Algeria, and China. In 2024, 80,000 phones were stolen in London, a 25% increase from 2023, with iPhones comprising the majority. The Metropolitan Police have urged smartphone companies to prevent stolen devices from accessing their cloud services to reduce resale value, but these companies have yet to agree, citing concerns over data protection and potential fraud.
3. <https://www.ft.com/content/0973bd8d-07b5-47ad-8133-47240352e1eb> - A recent survey by UK fintech start-up Nuke From Orbit reveals that nearly 29% of UK adults have experienced mobile phone theft, up from 17% in 2023. This surge has heightened concerns over digital security, especially as many users continue risky habits like reusing PINs and failing to update passwords. Nuke From Orbit is developing a 'kill switch' software to remotely disable phone apps and accounts, aiming to enhance personal cybersecurity.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/ca66ff06-860a-428c-9fc4-b5a0fd2412be> - The article discusses the surge in mobile phone snatch thefts, emphasizing an incident on the London Tube and providing broader context on this growing crime wave. Despite a 150% increase in such thefts over the past year, efforts to curb them have been largely ineffective. The lucrative trade in stolen devices and the extraction of data for financial gains drive this trend. New police powers introduced in the UK aim to tackle these issues, though experts argue for a multipronged international approach involving tech companies.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/d3c7a022-3fdc-4087-a399-ba1d8cfc0c4f> - The UK government is introducing new legislation to combat theft and antisocial behaviour. The bill allows police to raid properties using data from 'find my phone' apps and Bluetooth, eliminating the need for search warrants where stolen items have been electronically located. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper emphasized that these measures aim to address the rise in street thefts and the frustration victims face when their stolen items' locations are known, but no action is taken.
6. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-seizes-one-thousand-stolen-phones-in-a-week-493558> - The Metropolitan Police's intensified clampdown on the £50 million-a-year trade in stolen phones has led to 230 arrests and the seizure of over 1,000 handsets in a week. The operation targeted those responsible for theft, handling, and onward criminal supply or exportation of smartphones, setting a new standard for the Met's response to phone thefts.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/home-secretary-hosts-summit-on-mobile-phone-theft> - The Home Secretary convened a summit with law enforcement and leading tech companies to drive new action against mobile phone thefts. The summit aimed to address the surge in street crime, driven by a significant rise in snatch thefts, and to secure a collective effort to combat this criminality.