

SCAMS AWARENESS UPDATE

Older Persons Scams Awareness & Aftercare Project

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Bringing down the fraudsters

When out and about giving scams awareness talks to groups and individuals, and supporting victims of fraud, we're often asked, "Are the fraudsters ever caught?" Some people comment, "Nothing is ever done." and "What's the point in reporting scams?"

But, if nothing is reported, nothing can be done. The fraudsters continue to steal money or information and victims are left feeling embarrassed and ashamed, with their confidence and trust in themselves and others shattered.

Many victims have reported being defrauded. They have reported the crime to Citizen Advice Consumer Service, Trading Standards, the Police or Action Fraud. Only through this reporting have criminals been brought to justice.

So, in this edition we look at the successful convictions, thanks to members of the public reporting scams and fraud, and give some reminders so we don't become victims of similar frauds.

If you would like to talk about your personal situation and fraud, you can book a free appointment with a member of our Scams Awareness & Aftercare Team. Contact us on 01625 612958 or at enquiries@ageukce.org.

Convicted fraudsters...and how to avoid similar scams

Here are a range of cases where victims reporting fraud has led to criminals being caught and convicted. Being aware of these can help us avoid similar frauds and encourage us to report scams we find.

Romance fraudsters convicted for almost a total of 20 years

In two cases, three romance fraudsters were handed prison sentences of 12 years, almost 6 years and 2 years respectively. Between them, they had stolen over half a million pounds from people who believed they were in a genuine relationship. Some had met the fraudster in person.

The victims reported the crimes to the police. This meant the police had evidence to investigate and take action. It took almost six years to secure a conviction.

You can read about the cases in [Romance fraudsters jailed](#) and [I'm not going to let romance fraudster beat me](#)

Tips to avoid romance fraud

- Never send money to people you've not met in person.
- Don't overshare information early in a friendship.
- Don't be afraid to say "No" to a request for money, regardless of what the person may say the consequences are.

Tips to avoid counterfeit goods scams

- Only buy from authorised and reputable retailers.
- Check for authenticity features such as holographic stickers, serial numbers etc.
- Be wary of offers too good to be true, including availability of goods that are sold out elsewhere.

Local Trading Standards Team assist in removal of counterfeit goods

Our project partners, Cheshire East Trading Standards, have been successful in several operations to remove counterfeit goods from sale. Buying counterfeit goods, such as designer label items, e-cigarettes, beauty products etc. can be supporting organised crime, including people trafficking and modern slavery. These goods have rarely completed safety checks, so can be dangerous.

In a recent case, the fraudsters were handed a 30 month and 16 month prison sentence respectively.

You can read about this case, and more, at [Counterfeit goods conviction](#) and [£500 million goods seizure](#).

Rogue stairlift trader convicted

Cheshire East Council's Trading Standards Team secured a conviction against a trader who took deposits for stairlifts from older people but never provided the goods or made faulty installations.

The criminal received a six-month suspended prison sentence and were disqualified from being a company director for ten years.

They must pay £50,350 in compensation to those affected. They were also ordered to pay £500 compensation to each of three customers who suffered distress after their lifts failed to arrive.

- ### Tips to avoid rogue traders
- Do your research. Get recommendations and use reputable companies.
 - Get a range of quotes and take your time.
 - Don't pay upfront. Be wary of companies who ask for a large deposit or full payment before the work is completed.

Ongoing cases

We rarely hear about live police operations, but sometimes the publicity can prevent further victims or encourage victims to come forward.

In an international operation, one of the world's biggest criminal marketplaces used by online fraudsters to buy passwords has been closed down in a global law enforcement crackdown. The investigation is ongoing, and it may be some years before the case reaches court. More information can be found [online](#).

Report it!

If you have been approached by a fraudster, please report it. Only reported scams can be acted on. You can:

- **Report any fraud to the police by contacting Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or at www.actionfraud.police.uk**
- **Report rogue traders to Trading Standards on the Citizen Advice Consumer Service number 0808 223 1133 or [online](#).**

The information you give may be the beginning of an investigation or the last piece of the jigsaw. Either way, you can help prevent others becoming victims and bring criminals to justice.

Here are some recent frauds to look out for. Please share with family, friends and community.

Fake offers of help to recover accounts



Sometimes, our social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter etc.) are hacked and we want to restore them or recover the information.

We've had reports of fraudsters offering to recover such accounts, contacting people through social media. They then may steal your information or ask for payment.

If your social media account is ever compromised, contact the provider (Facebook, Twitter etc.) independently, and only deal with the genuine organisation for recovery.

Offers too good to be true

With the cost of living continuing to rise, we're all on the look out for help to make ends meet.

Fraudsters are, again, pretending to be well-known supermarkets offering a £200 cash reward scheme. On further investigation, the emails or websites these offers are on are nothing to do with the genuine supermarkets, often with a non-uk based contact.

Remember, if an offer is too good to be true, it probably is. Always check any correspondence is genuine before proceeding.



Identity theft on the rise locally



We've had reports of identities being stolen and then being used to open bank accounts and apply for credit in the victims' names.

Keep your personal information safe, including name, address, date of birth, National Insurance number email address etc. Dispose of mail safely. Make sure that you don't share personal details online, even over time, as criminals build up your identity from many sources.

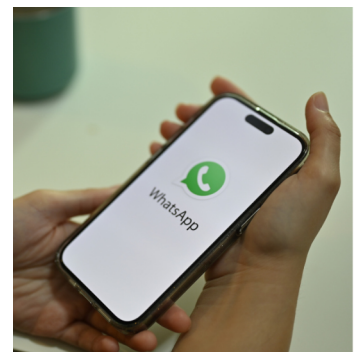
If you do become a victim of identity theft, contact your bank and the police immediately.

WhatsApp hack scam

The police have issued an alert about a WhatsApp account takeover scam.

Criminals pose as friends and request security codes, gaining access to WhatsApp accounts with victims listed as contacts.

They send normal messages, whilst at the same time sending a six-digit code to the victim's phone. They claim to have sent it by accident, and ask for the code back. Once they have the code, they lock the victim out of their account and use the account for fraud.



COMING NEXT TIME

- Current fraud alerts
- Identity theft

Though we don't like to see you leave, you can unsubscribe from these bulletins by emailing sally.wilson@ageukce.org

The Older Persons Scams Awareness & Aftercare Project is brought to you by