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Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 82

The articles in these bulletins are based on real life complaints made to Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards department, unless otherwise stated, to make them as relevant as possible to readers. Names, exact addresses etc. have been withheld to avoid identifying complainants and to comply with GDPR so please feel free to share the contents with friends, family, neighbours or any community groups you are a part of. For details of scams reported in other parts of Scotland please click on the [Trading Standards Scotland Bulletin page](#).

Bogus Callers and Rogue Traders

One resident in the Kincardine area recently decided that he would like his garden layout updated so decided to search for landscapers to do the work. The resident settled on a company which he found on Facebook and made contact.

The trader later arrived at the resident's home to assess the job and subsequently provided a quote. An agreement was reached between the parties that the resident would pay for materials up front and the remainder of the work on completion. The resident then paid the trader £8000 in cash for materials.

Over the next four weeks, the trader attended the resident's address on only five days to take away items which were to be disposed of. No new construction work took place on the job. The work then ground to a halt. The resident later contacted the trader on a number of occasions but on each occasion was given a different excuse as to why no work has been done, so reported the matter to Trading Standards. The resident was faced with being out of pocket by £8000 and having to find a genuine trader to complete the work.

Some points to consider:

- When looking for a trader to complete a job, DO NOT use social media. Rogue traders frequently trawl social media to look for their next victim to cheat,
- Instead, use reliable websites like [Aberdeen Care and Repair](#) or [Trusted Trader](#) where the trader should have been vetted when they joined the scheme. Also, see below regarding Aberdeenshire Council's Trusted Trader scheme,

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- Ask friends, family and neighbours if they can recommend a trader who they've had work done for them and which they were happy with,
- Make up a shortlist of at least three traders and ask all of these for written quotes,
- Also, when getting quotes, try to obtain details of each trader's works address and contact details, so you can contact them if you need to,
- Discuss with your chosen trader how you will pay them. Avoid paying in cash but if you must, make it clear that you will be expecting a written business receipt at the time of payment (not at some time in the future). It would be preferable that you pay by cheque instead (but still obtain a receipt) or by direct bank transfer as this will provide you with a paper trail for your payment,
- If you must pay by cash, have a witness with you and insist that the trader checks it in front of you both,
- If the trader tries to insist that they'll take you to the bank for cash, this is a red flag that you may be dealing with a rogue trader. Try to enlist the help of someone else from your household or a neighbour to prevent this. As a last ditch attempt, when you get to the bank ask to conduct the withdrawal in private on a one to one basis with bank staff, then tell them about your concerns,
- Don't pay for the total cost of the work up front. This is what rogue traders want so they can disappear with your money. Genuine traders will usually have enough cash reserves or a trade account where they can purchase materials then bill the customer at the completion of smaller jobs,
- An alternative would be to agree that you will pay for materials in a staged fashion, usually for larger jobs, but only once the trader has provided you with the proper invoices,
- Keep safe all paperwork provided by the trader as they may prove important if a dispute arises. Do not accept handwritten quotes or invoices, instead insist on proper headed documents.

If you think you've been the victim of a Rogue Trader, please contact your local Trading Standards office to report the matter or to find out what your legal rights are.

Scams etc.

Telephone Scam

One resident of Mearns recently received a phone call out of the blue from a man called John Cooper. His colleague, Alex Brown, called back the next day and claimed to be a mortgage advisor. He did not say which company he worked with but the area code on the caller ID showed the call to be coming from the

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01213 area. After brief pleasantries the caller told the resident that he had overpaid on his mortgage by £4000 and that he, the caller, could help the resident recover the overpayment.

The caller then began asking personal questions of the resident; his age, if he was married and which bank he was with. When the resident asked for some verification of the caller's authenticity, the caller became quite abrasive and threatened to close the resident's file. He also instructed the resident to send a sum of £300 cash by special delivery to an address in Tarporley, a village in Cheshire, which had to arrive by 3.00pm the next day. There was no explanation given about what this £300 was paying for.

At this point the resident, rightly, becoming irritated by the caller, simply hung up. A few minutes later 'Alex Brown' phoned back and left a message on the resident's answering service threatening to report him to the Court of Justice. The resident received further calls about this matter, from a woman with an English accent calling from a '020' (London) number, also threatening the resident with court proceedings.

The resident has no idea how the callers obtained his phone number. He later reported the matter to Trading Standards and enquiries are ongoing.

Some points to consider:

- This was undoubtedly a scam, most notably it was crudely and ineptly executed by bunglers. The callers' aggressive and bullying manner seems almost designed to alienate potential victims rather than snare them into the scam (which can only be to the benefit of potential victims),
- Both 'John Cooper' and 'Alex Brown', despite having Anglicised names, had Asian accents. Undoubtedly, these would be assumed names,
- None of the callers divulged which company they apparently worked for,
- None of the callers explained satisfactorily how they knew that the resident had overpaid his mortgage,
- The sum of a £4000 overpayment did not really exist. It was simply a hook to snare an unwary victim into the scam,
- A competent scammer would have an explanation of what the sum of £300 was for. These scammers didn't, but undoubtedly this was the sum which they hoped to cheat the resident out of,
- Threats of legal action can only serve to alienate potential victims, especially when they had committed no offence but had simply refused to comply with the scammers' instructions. These were simply empty threats,
- A check of 'Alex Brown's' 01213 number on the [Who Called Me](#) website, the UK's reverse call look-up service showed that the number was based

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in Birmingham and had been the subject of over 2000 enquiries, with over 100 enquirers reporting that it was associated with scams,

- The English female's 020 number had been looked up over 100 times and was also linked to suspected scams,

What to do if you receive such a phone call:

- Please don't divulge any personal or financial information,
- Ask the caller how they got your phone number,
- Ask the caller who they work for,
- Ask the caller how they obtained the information they're calling about,
- Please don't be taken in with tales of large sums of money being promised if you'll only allow the caller to 'help' you (this is 'the carrot'),
- Please don't be intimidated by threats of legal action against you by the caller because you won't do what they want. These are empty threats with no basis in law (these are 'the stick').

If, on hearing the caller's answers to these questions, you suspect that the caller is a scammer, simply hang up. If you can, note their number then block it and report the matter to your local Trading Standards. If you are persistently pestered by calls like these speak to your telephony provider about their call interception services.

Misc.

Aberdeenshire Council's Trusted Trader scheme continues to develop, with 3 more applications to join received this week and a number of applicants already undergoing the vetting process.

The primary objective of the scheme is to provide consumers across Aberdeenshire with a single point of contact for genuine, reliable traders with high standards which will hopefully then lead to a reduction in the types of rogue trader incidents which are reported to the service and which feature repeatedly in these bulletins.

A secondary benefit of the scheme, to members, is that they may see an increase in the number of enquiries they receive from consumers looking to get work done.

Some bullet points about the scheme:

- Applicants who are successful in joining, for a limited time, can do so for 50% of the normal cost,
- All traders of the scheme will have agreed to trade fairly with consumers,
- All traders of the scheme will have been trading for at least 6 months,



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- All traders of the scheme will be able to demonstrate an excellent trading history,
- All traders listed on the scheme must sign up to a Code of Practice
- Consumers who use the scheme can, on completion of a job, leave feedback on the trader, which will be reviewed,
- Where disputes arise, these will be actively reviewed by Trading Standards to try to reach a solution for both parties through a dispute resolution process,

Further information about the scheme can be found at [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader](#) and traders who are interested in applying for the scheme or find out more about it can do so at [Apply to Join](#).

We would also ask that any of our readers who know of a trader who might be interested in joining to pass this information on to them.

Conclusion

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with such a scenario where fear, alarm and panic are tools often used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time.

If you have been the victim of a Bogus Caller or other form of scam, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can maintain a detailed picture about scammers operating in the Shire. This would be a great help to us to tackle this sort of crime.

If you have any information to share about the unlawful sale of tobacco or disposable vapes, please use the Contact Info below to pass that information to Trading Standards. If you would prefer, you can report the information anonymously to Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111.

Contact Info

For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them on 0808 164 6000. For urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222.

Aberdeen City Council's Trading Standards department can be contacted by calling 0300 0200 292 or e-mailing tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk



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Contact Police Scotland on 999 if you need urgent Police assistance or 101 for non-urgent matters.

For more information about scams please visit the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

Please direct any media queries to news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or 01467 538222 during office hours.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).