

Trading Standards Scams News

A round-up of the latest scams alerts



Autumn 2024

Welcome....

to the latest edition of the Leicestershire Trading Standards Service scams newsletter. Here you will find details of the latest scams and information about how to protect yourself and report a scam.

Pension Fraud Warning

Action Fraud, the national fraud and cybercrime reporting service, has launched a pension fraud awareness campaign, forewarning people to protect their pensions and investments from fraudsters. New data reveals £17.7 million was lost to pension fraud in 2023, this equates to an average loss of £46,959 per person.

The warning comes with the advice for people to be cautious and protect their pension pots from fraudsters trying to trick people out of their life savings, by encouraging the public to do their research before making changes to pension arrangements.

Common signs of pension scams include:

- ! Unsolicited contact by phone, text message, email or in person. Since January 2019, there has been a ban on cold calling about pensions. This means you should not be contacted by any company about your pension, unless you've asked them to contact you.
- ! High pressure sales tactics – such as time limited offers to get the best deal, or using couriers to send documents, who will wait until they're signed. Never be rushed into making a decision.
- ! Where contact details are only mobile phone numbers or a PO box address, or they don't allow you to call them back



- ! When the caller claims they can help you to release cash from a pension before the age of 55. Only in very rare cases, such as very poor health, is this possible, and a tax bill can arise from this.
- ! Callers claiming to know of tax loopholes or promise extra tax savings.
- ! Offers of high rates of return on your investment but say it's low risk. Investments can go up as well as down, so if it sounds too good to be true it probably is.
- ! Offers or mentions of one-off investments, time-limited offers, upfront cash incentives, free pension reviews, legal loopholes or even government initiatives.

Follow these simple steps to protect yourself from pension scams:

- ✓ **Reject any unsolicited calls, emails, text messages or visitors to your door** - if you're contacted out of the blue about a pension opportunity, chances are it's a scam, simply ignore it. Be cautious if you're contacted about any financial product or opportunity and they mention using your pension.
- ✓ **Be wary of offers of free pension reviews**, or fraudsters may say they'll help you access your pension pot before the age of 55 in exchange for a fee – but unless you're seriously unwell or have a certain type of scheme, this isn't possible. Professional advice on pensions is not free – a free offer out of the blue, from a company you have not dealt with before is probably a scam.
- ✓ **Seek advice first and check who you're dealing with** - if you're thinking about changing your pension arrangements, it's best to get financial advice beforehand. If you want to find an adviser, make sure they are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and authorised to provide pension advice. Never take advice from the company that contacted you, this may be part of a scam.
- ✓ **Don't be pressured or rushed** - Take your time to make all the checks you need – even if this means turning down an 'amazing deal'. Be wary of promised returns that sound too good to be true and don't be rushed or pressured into making a decision.
- ✓ **Avoid promises or offers** - of 'one-off investments', 'time-limited offers', 'upfront cash incentives', 'free pension reviews', 'legal loopholes' or 'government initiatives'.

If you have been a victim of this type of fraud:

- Report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or by using the [online reporting tool](#) on the website.
- [Report to the FCA](#) – you can report an unauthorised firm or scam to the FCA by contacting their Consumer Helpline on 0800 111 6768 or using the reporting form online
- You can report nuisance calls and messages to the Information Commissioner's Office using their [online reporting tool](#) or by calling 0303 123 1113.
- If you've agreed to transfer your pension and now suspect a scam, contact your pension provider straight away. They may be able to stop a transfer that hasn't taken place yet.
- If you have already invested in a scam, fraudsters are likely to target you again or sell your details to other criminals. The follow-up scam may be separate or related to the

previous fraud, such as an offer to get your money back or to buy back the investment after you pay a fee.

Please be vigilant to these sorts of scams, and please report any concerns you may have to the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133

Card Fraud

Card fraud is when a criminal steals personal information from your credit or debit card or steals the card itself, to then use this information to purchase goods or services, which will be charged to your card. In some cases, criminals apply for a credit card in your name without you knowing and open a new account. This will enable the fraudsters to apply for loans, buy things that you will be charged for, and apply for more cards.

What to look out for:

- ! You see an abnormal transaction on your bank statement – call the bank if you know you didn't approve this.
- ! Your credit card is unexpectedly declined – if this happens, contact your bank immediately.
- ! You receive bills, invoices or receipts that you weren't expecting – call the company who sent it and check why.

How to protect yourself:

- ✓ Keep your card safe and shield your PIN whenever you enter it.
- ✓ If your card is lost or stolen, report it to your bank immediately.
- ✓ Check your bank statements for unauthorised transactions or suspicious transactions you never made.
- ✓ If you have online banking/apps, set up your notifications to come through whenever you make a payment.
- ✓ Make sure only you have access to your post and destroy or shred unwanted documents that include your personal information.
- ✓ As soon as your new card arrives, sign it straight away. If you're disposing of your old card, make sure you cut through the chip and dispose of the sections in separate bin bags.



For advice about how to report fraud or if you have been a victim of a scam, please see further information at the bottom of this newsletter.

NTS Charter

As partners to the National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team, Leicestershire County Council have signed the new Fraud and Scam Victim Charter. This new Charter is the next step in supporting the 'No Blame No Shame' campaign launched by the NTS Scams Team.

What is the charter? The NTS Charter supports victims of fraud and scams and recognises the impact this can have on individuals affected by this crime. The charter requires organisations to have the victim's best interests as their primary consideration.

Why sign up? The charter reminds us how we treat all victims of crime, but with a focus on fraud and scams. Research has shown that when people realise, they have become a victim of this type of crime, their most common feelings were 'anger' at themselves, feeling stupid, or embarrassed. Victims of scams are not stupid, naïve, or greedy – they are victims of a crime.



Who is it for? Organisations who sign up to the charter, commit to not blaming or shaming the victims but to show empathy, understanding and compassion. They will also take the victim's age, maturity, views, needs, and concerns into account.

By signing up to this Charter, we will commit to following the principles of the Charter

- 1. Support and Empathy:** We commit to show empathy, understanding, and compassion to you and ALL victims of fraud and scams, acknowledging the impact of your experiences without judgment.
- 2. Dignity and Respect:** If you need support, you will be treated with the utmost dignity and respect. We will encourage an environment where you feel valued and empowered and are able to make decisions about the support you need.
- 3. No Blame and No Shame:** We are committed to creating a space free from victim blaming and shaming. We will focus on help and support rather than judgment or criticism.
- 4. Clear Communication:** We commit to maintain open, clear, simple, and transparent communication, ensuring you are informed about the support available, your rights, and the process involved in getting the help you need.
- 5. Support for your well-being:** We aim to assist with any immediate challenges you face, but we will also consider and plan how best we can work with you in the future.

Spray Foam Warning

Trading Standards has received consumer calls regarding the authenticity of the trades people approaching residents in relation to spray foam and then the removal of spray foam from their properties.

Spray foam insulation is a liquid polyurethane foam that is sprayed to insulate and seal buildings. It's applied with a spray gun, expands to fill the area, and then sets to create an insulating layer. Spray foam insulation can be used in many places, including roofs, lofts, attics, walls, floors, and crawlspaces. Spray foam insulation can help improve energy efficiency and reduce energy bills. It's also effective at reducing air infiltration through cracks and joints.

Residents are receiving cold calls from companies who are aware spray foam installation has taken place at their property and being advised to have it removed for varying reasons. The cold callers are advising people that there is a national register of homes that have had spray foam installed and that is the reason for the call.

There are legitimate reasons for having spray foam removed including:

- Spray foam can trap moisture, leading to dampness and condensation on the underside of a roof. This can cause timber-framed roofs to decay.
- Spray foam insulation can potentially cause health issues, such as asthma, lung damage, and other respiratory problems.
- Some lenders may not give a mortgage on a property with spray foam insulation in the loft or roof.
- Many surveyors may down-value properties with spray foam insulation.
- Spray foam insulation may need to be removed for renovation or remodelling projects. Or due to structural damage or deterioration.
- Spray foam insulation that is installed incorrectly can cause problems.
- Spray foam insulation may need to be removed to upgrade to a different insulation type.

If you are unsure, confused or unclear you could seek an independent survey before agreeing to any installation/removal and discussing with your mortgage company as to any effect on the property value and saleability.

Our top tips:

- ✓ We ask that you never assume the traders are legitimate companies just because they have called you.
- ✓ Never feel pressured into having work carried out before understanding the facts.
- ✓ Carry out some research into the company.
- ✓ Always ask traders to put in writing the work and the cost of the work - legitimate companies will have no issues with supplying this information to you in writing or by email.
- ✓ Get more than one quote for the work; we would suggest getting three separate quotes from different companies.
- ✓ Never give your personal information or bank details to anyone until you are fully satisfied, that you are dealing with a legitimate company.
- ✓ Always pay by card or cheque rather than paying by cash and never be pushed into being driven to your bank to withdraw cash by anyone.

There is a spray foam advice centre who will offer free advice at the following website <https://sfacuk.org>

Black Friday Scams

Black Friday traditionally falls on the last Friday of November and marks the start of the pre-Christmas shopping season in the United States. However, this has quickly caught on in the UK and has become one of the biggest shopping sales events of the year. Black Friday 2024 is on the 29th of November online and in most stores, followed by Cyber Monday on the 2nd December, as the name suggests, this is aimed specifically at online shoppers. These yearly shopping events are a prime time for scammers to try and take advantage of unsuspecting shoppers.

Cybercriminals exploit various tactics to deceive shoppers, such as setting up fake websites, sending phishing emails with malicious links, or offering heavy discounts. In some cases, fraudsters also create fake advertisements on social media platforms that redirect unsuspecting customers to scam sites.

The goal is often to collect sensitive personal information such as credit card details, passwords, or even identity information, which can then be sold on the dark web. Or, used for unauthorised purchases.

Given the rise in online shopping and digital payment methods, Black Friday and Cyber Monday have become lucrative opportunities for fraudsters to exploit the high volume of sales transactions.

BLACK FRIDAY/CYBER MONDAY



Five top tips for protecting yourself from Black Friday/Cyber Monday fraud:

1. **Shop with well-known and trusted retailers** - These retailers typically have strong security measures in place to protect your personal and financial information.
2. **Avoid deals that seem too good to be true** - If a deal looks too good to be true, it probably is. Fraudsters display heavily discounted prices to entice customers into making impulsive decisions.
3. **Use secure payment methods** - Whenever possible, use secure payment methods like credit cards or digital wallets (e.g., PayPal or Apple/Samsung Pay), which offer added fraud protection and the ability to dispute unauthorised charges.
4. **Look for the padlock symbol** - Always ensure that the website you're shopping on is secure. Look for the padlock symbol in the address bar and ensure the website address begins with "https://". This shows that the website is encrypted and safer to use. Avoid entering any personal or payment information on sites that lack these security indicators.
5. **Be cautious of phishing attempts** - Scammers will often send out what's called a 'phishing' email that look like they're from a legitimate retailer in an attempt to steal your

information. These messages typically contain offers of amazing deals or discounts, with malicious links that lead to fake websites. Be suspicious of unsolicited emails, and never click on links unless you're sure they are from a trusted source. Instead, go directly to the retailer's website to verify any details.

You can more advice on the [Get safe online](#) website.

Events

Leicestershire County Council (LCC) hold an Annual Liaison Event for Parish and Town Councils in July each year, and our officers attended the event. LCC work in partnership with the Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC) to support Parish and Town Councils in Leicestershire.

This provides an opportunity to bring together representatives of Communities across Leicestershire to network, share best practice and hear updates from both the LRALC and LCC.



If you would like Trading Standards to attend your event or to request a scams awareness session, please email: tradingstandards@leics.gov.uk

Finally....

If you would like to report a scam, or you have been a victim fraud, you can get in touch with the following organisations:

Action Fraud – <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline - 0808 223 1133

If you think fraudsters may have obtained your money, contact you bank immediately using the contact details on the back of your card.

To keep up to date with the latest scams information and advice, you can follow the Leicestershire Trading Standards Service Facebook page at:

www.facebook.com/leicstradingstandards

Leicestershire Trading Standards Service

Tel: 0116 305 8000

Email: tradingstandards@leics.gov.uk

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