

Information Network Bulletin

Edition 3- 2023/24

**Welcome to the latest edition of the Information Network Bulletin brought to you by
Croydon Council's Trading Standards team.**

**In addition to general news from the team, it includes details of some of the latest
scams and fraud alerts which we have become aware of in recent months.**

We hope that you find it useful.



RECENT PROSECUTION

A mini-supermarket has been fined £4,000 by magistrates after Croydon Council prosecuted the store for selling alcohol to a child during a test purchase.

At Croydon Magistrates Court VP and Sons Ltd, who trade as Ellalan Supermarket, in London Road, admitted selling a Smirnoff vodka and cola mixed drink to a person under 18 years of age.

The council's trading standards service regularly carries out test purchasing exercises at shops in the borough to ensure that businesses are complying with the law and that ages are being verified by sellers, in order to safeguard children from buying age-restricted goods.

The magistrates on 30 October found that there was no attempt by the member of staff at Ellalan Supermarket to establish the child's age during the test purchase on 15 February, and there had been a failure to police sales.

They also found that no training had been given to the sales assistant on selling alcohol to children and that a letter warning about upcoming test purchases in the area had been ignored.

If you are aware of any shops selling to under aged, please report them to Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer Advice line on 0808 223 1133 or via their 'Chat Service' or an online reporting form – all found at:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/>

Scams on Facebook Marketplace



There has been a sharp increase in people getting scammed when shopping for things like cars, tickets, garden furniture, gym equipment and clothes on Facebook Marketplace.

Facebook Marketplace is a platform where private sellers can sell things they no longer want and it can be a great way to get second hand items if you are going to collect and can see the item first hand before parting with any money. However, more people and profiles are selling new items, business and traders are also using the platform and it can be hard to know which profiles are legitimate.

Recently there has been a huge increase in scams being reported. This is mainly in relation to items people are expecting to be delivered. Often the items do not exist, never arrive, if they arrive they are counterfeit or poor quality and the account simply stops responding when you complain or try to get a refund. When people have paid by bank transfer, they often lose the money. Criminals can easily hide behind normal looking profiles or accounts but they are simply there to commit fraud.

Here are a few signs to look out for.

Is it too good to be true?

It's not a bargain if it never turns up. Many of these scams occur when people pay by bank transfer, the item never arrives and the seller stops responding.

Do you have to pay right away?

A genuine seller won't pressure you into a quick sale.

Can you meet the seller in person?

Look for things for sale nearby so you can check the item before you pay. If you can see the item you are buying in person, at least you know it exists and can check the quality!

Will they let you pay by card?

Never pay by bank transfer. Pay by debit or credit card to protect your money.

Remember, lots of these adverts are classed as private sales, so you do not have the same consumer protection as you would buying from a legitimate trader. You also do not know the true identity or location of the person behind the profile so tracing people for refunds is extremely hard.

Please think carefully before parting with any money for items advertised on Facebook Marketplace, especially those you are not collecting in person and viewing before you part with your money.

No Blame No Shame Campaign – National Trading Standards

19 MILLION LOSE MONEY TO SCAMS BUT FEWER THAN A THIRD REPORT

No Blame No Shame campaign launched to encourage people to talk about scams

National Trading Standards calls on Government to improve support for victims



73% of UK adults – or 40 million people – have been targeted by scams, with 35% - or 19 million – losing money because of this criminal offence. The average amount lost by victims is £1,730, but fewer than a third (32%) report the crime to the authorities, according to new research, released today by National Trading Standards (NTS).

Despite high numbers of scams and the huge financial and emotional impact on victims, these crimes are severely underreported. NTS's research showed that when people realised they'd become a victim of a scam, the most common feelings were being 'angry' with themselves, (46%), feeling 'stupid' (40%) and 'embarrassed' (38%). Fewer than a third (32%) then reported the crime to an authority such as the police, and 42% did not tell their bank. Two thirds didn't even tell a relative or friend they'd become a victim.

NTS believes it is victims' shame, combined with the worry that they will not be supported if they come forward, that prevents so many reporting these crimes. This underreporting means the scale and impact of fraud and scams is not fully understood, victim support services are not funded properly, and a sense of blame continues to fall on the victim.

This vicious cycle of shame, underreporting and under resourcing may also be contributing to a sense of helplessness in society – an incredible one in five adults (20%) believe they are likely to become a victim of a scam in the next five years. That's why NTS is launching its #NoBlameNoShame campaign urging people to talk about scams to reduce the stigma, making victims feel more able to talk and report.

The NTS Scams Team recently commissioned an academic report to consider some of the techniques criminals use with victims of fraud, scams and financial abuse. Perpetrators of these crimes use coercion and control techniques similar to those used by perpetrators of domestic abuse, including isolation, gas-lighting and love bombing. Offenders in both types of crimes ruthlessly manipulate their victims into making decisions they would never normally make and leave them feeling ashamed and unable to tell anyone what is going on. This shame is often compounded by other people's responses, including victim blaming and shaming.

The research also found that criminals most often try to scam people via a phone call, followed by email, text or WhatsApp, and then social media. The landline phone in particular remains a key route to reaching those consumers affected by vulnerability – separate data shows that households with a call blocker received an average of 120 scam and nuisance calls each in the last year alone with the most common scams being 'insurance' followed by 'home improvements' and then 'tech support'.

The #NoBlameNoShame campaign was launched with practical advice and support on how we should speak about fraud and scams; information is available at www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/noblamenoshame.

Scams should be reported to Action Fraud at www.actionfraud.police.uk or on 0300 123 2040.

For advice about scams you can call the Citizens Advice consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133, or use their online tool at:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/reporting-a-scam/>

You can also visit www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk for information and updates on the latest scams.

Recycling of electrical goods - Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Regulations

Whether you're getting rid of a broken toaster or a bulky washing machine, make sure you dispose of the product correctly.

Small electrical items that are broken (and can't be reused) are classed as WEEE – waste electrical and electronic equipment. WEEE covers a wide range of products, with the full list including small appliances such as kettles and toasters, plus bigger items including lawn mowers and vacuum cleaners.

Any electrical item that has a crossed-out wheelee bin symbol (shown here) can be recycled. Look out for this symbol when you're deciding what to do with your clutter. Don't place your old electronic devices directly into a bin to be sent to landfill. Doing so means that the products may leak hazardous chemicals, contributing to water and air pollution.

Please visit the following website to find out what you can recycle and where:

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/rubbish-and-recycling/reuse-and-recycling-centres>

Croydon Council can collect large and unwanted items that cannot be re-used, recycled or transported to our recycling centres.

However, most retailers must provide a way for you to dispose of old household electrical and electronic equipment when you buy a new version of the same item. You must check with the retailer before you order a collection. Many retailers offer a paid-for pick-up scheme, where your old product is collected at the same time a new one is delivered, or a free drop-off scheme – please ask the retailer.

There is a charge for Croydon Council to provide a bulky waste collection service. The collection service operates all year round and costs:

- £35.53 for 1 to 3 items
- £58.45 for 4 to 6 items

Please visit the following website for further information:

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/rubbish-and-recycling/bulky-waste-collection>

Illegal Tobacco - How to Report It

Croydon Trading Standards are continuing their work eliminating illegal tobacco from the borough. We have recently seized illegal non-duty paid cigarettes, hand-rolling tobacco and oral tobacco from local small shops in Croydon. Illegal tobacco supply is linked to Organised Criminal Gangs who are linked to other types of criminality. Illicit tobacco takes trade away from legitimate traders and encourages criminals to the area.

If you are aware of any shops or market traders selling illegal tobacco that includes counterfeit and non-duty paid cigarettes or hand-rolling tobacco, foreign brands of cigarettes with no legal market in the UK and banned oral tobacco, or any traders selling singles, please report them to us.

The main way to report any issue to Trading Standards in the first instance is via the Citizens Advice Consumer Advice line on 0808 223 1133 or via their 'Chat Service' or an online reporting form – all found at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/>

Energy Saving Scams – Cold Callers at Large

As the price of energy continues to rise, many residents are looking for ways to reduce their heating costs and may fall victim to scammers claiming to help them do this.

Croydon Trading Standards received a report from a resident who received a telephone cold call from a company claiming to be part of a government scheme, offering a free survey for foam loft insulation. They told her that this would be soft foam, not the hard foam known to cause problems, so keen to cut her energy bills she agreed to a visit.

The surveyor called on her the following day and proceeded to launch into a hard sell as to how good the product was and how much money she would save. He then quoted her a price of £9,000 which was far more than she could afford, so she told him this. He was quick to advise her that there was funding available and that by quoting a code which he gave her, she could reduce the cost by 35%. The resident was unsure and said that she wanted to think about it,

He then said that she could get more codes and more funding and if she committed to have the foam installed today it would only be £3,910, but she needed to pay a deposit immediately. The resident complained that she had agreed to a quote not a hard sell and refused to pay a deposit, despite being pressured to agree there and then and being told by the surveyor that he would stay there while she rang Sainsburys to get a loan to pay the deposit. At this, the resident had had enough and asked him to leave and reported the matter.

When Trading Standards looked into the 'funding' the surveyor had promised in order to entice the resident into signing the contract for the installation of the foam, it was discovered that the resident did not meet any of the criteria to receive government funding. So had she signed the contract, she would have found herself liable to pay the full £9,000 original price, not the discounted £3,910 that she had been promised.

Trading Standards reminds residents not to be rushed into signing contracts. If someone is pressuring you into entering an agreement there and then, it is usually a bad sign, as they are not allowing you to verify what they have told you or get quotes from other traders.

Croydon Healthy Homes can advise you whether you are eligible for loft insulation through any current schemes. They can also talk to you about your heating system and check if you are using your heating controls to heat your home as effectively as possible. To apply, complete the online application form through the webpage at: www.croydon.gov.uk/healthyhomes



Paper application forms are also available if required.



Scam

Most of us have received fake emails claiming to be from PayPal. But what about scam emails being generated from a genuine PayPal address?

That could trip up many of us, and it's frighteningly easy to do.

The scam starts with you getting a 'money request' from a genuine PayPal email address – service@paypal.com.

This might seem above board, but scammers are exploiting PayPal's service to send out fake payment requests, often for high-value items, or posing as HMRC to demand 'overdue' tax payments.

The latest email states: 'HMRC Tax Payment Overdue. Please send a balance of [£] within 48 hours to avoid a warrant being issued for your arrest or call [phone number]'.

In other versions of the scam, the fake invoice states the victim's PayPal account has been compromised and urges them to call a fake fraud hotline.

If you call the phone number, you'll be connected directly to the scammers, who then trick their victims into compromising their own PayPal account and personal details.

Which? tested the money request function and found that they could send a request for a payment to an email address with no associated PayPal account. Which? could even send requests to 20 different emails in one go.

The Which? request claimed to be from HMRC and threatened the recipient with arrest if they didn't pay.

Which? were then able to pay the invoice without creating a PayPal account and without encountering any on-screen fraud warnings.

Which? Told PayPal about the scam and they said

'We are aware of this phishing scam, and encourage customers to always be vigilant online and to contact Customer Service directly if they suspect they are a target of a scam.' PayPal added that it's currently introducing fraud warnings to invoices and money requests.

What you can do

Don't pay PayPal invoices you don't recognise, and don't call phone numbers in those invoices.

Think about how to independently verify what you're being asked. For example, if the message claims to be from HMRC, contact the tax office via its official HMRC gov.uk site. If the message claims your PayPal has been hacked, contact PayPal customer Services.

Croydon Trading Standards Need Test Purchasers

Trading Standards work with young people to monitor the sales of age-restricted products across Croydon. Part of this work involves a young person under strictly controlled conditions trying to buy knives, alcohol, fireworks and cigarettes & vapes from shops in the borough. We are looking for volunteers, aged between 14-16 years and 18-24 years to help us carry out test purchasing activities.

To find out more and sign up as a test purchaser contact Croydon Trading Standards by email at: trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk or call us on 020 8407 1311



Drivers issued urgent warning of 'alarming' car scams which could cost motorists £1,000

Experts are warning that drivers are particularly likely to get scammed on social media websites. New data shows that car and van buying scams have risen by a staggering 74 per cent in the first half of 2023, compared to the same time period in 2022. Vehicles are now the most common type of online shopping scam reported by UK victims, in addition to accessories like car parts.

On average, victims are losing an average of £998, with younger people aged between 25 and 34 being stung most often.

The majority of car scams take place on social media platforms including Facebook and Instagram, with fraudsters easily creating fake listings.

Drivers will usually see pictures of genuine vehicles to seem more convincing and are often made to leave a deposit to “secure” the vehicle. Often scammers use pressure tactics to force the buyer into making a quick decision, like saying that payment must be made by a certain deadline.

The potential car buyer is “tricked” into sending money via a bank transfer, given that they offer little protection if something with the transaction goes wrong. Usually, as soon as the money has been sent, the seller will block the buyer and disappear, with fake details being used to ensure nothing can be traced back to them.

The majority of these scams start on social media platforms, where it is easy for criminals to set up fake profiles to advertise goods that don't exist. Premium brands are often used to lure in car buyers with deals that seem too good to be true, with BMWs and Audis commonly appearing on social media trying to trick potential victims.

Motorbikes and classic cars also appear in scam adverts regularly, with vans being targeted to convert into campervans as the “van life” trend becomes more popular.

Buying directly from approved dealers is the best way to guarantee you're paying for a genuine vehicle, and always use your debit or credit card for maximum safety.

If you do want to buy something you've found through social media, only transfer funds once the car is in your possession.

If you have been the victim of a car purchasing scam you should report it to Action Fraud on <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>

Tel: 0300 123 2040 open Monday-Friday 8am-8pm

You should also contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Service for advice on 0808 223 1133 open Monday – Friday 9am-5pm

Keep warm safely this winter

With an average of around 102 fires per day in December, it's important to remember that winter can be a risky time - overloaded plug sockets, fraying electric blankets and dodgy Christmas gifts can all contribute to the risk of fire or electric shock.

Portable Heaters

Portable heaters are responsible for 4% of accidental house fires each year, as well as being responsible for a higher percentage of fatalities and serious injuries per incident compared to other items.

Be safe using electrical heaters

1. DO keep them away from flammable materials.
2. DON'T leave them on overnight or unattended.
3. DON'T plug them into extension leads.

Research by Electrical Safety First, shows over 4 million more people in the UK are turning to these devices this winter compared to last year. As energy costs are increasing this winter, it is understandable that more people are looking to use these devices to stay warm. But using them incorrectly can pose massive risks in the home and can cause devastating fires. We urge everyone to look out for their family and friends to spread the word and avoid more tragedies.

Portable Heater Safety Tips

Most portable heater fires are caused by people making basic mistakes that could easily be avoided, like knocking heaters over – easily done, particularly if you have young children and pets running around.

Elderly people and children are particularly at risk, so when you are making sure elderly relatives and neighbours are warm, or your children are playing, follow our simple tips to make sure that they are safe.

- Put your heater on a level surface, well away from anything that could knock it over.
- Make sure your heater is at least a metre away from combustible materials, such as paper, furniture or curtains.
- Never dry clothes directly on a heater or in close proximity to your heater.
- If you need to dry clothes in the same room as your heater or open fire, ensure they are placed well away from the heat to reduce the risk of a fire starting.
- Don't leave your heater unattended whilst in use or while you are asleep. See our additional advice on this below.
- Never power a heater from an extension lead – they can easily be overloaded and cause fires.
- Avoid second hand heaters. Make sure you buy from recognised manufacturers and retailers.
- Always register a new portable heater with the manufacturer. That way you can be contacted easily if a safety notice or recall is required. To find out more information about registering your appliances, visit our Product Registration page.
- Use our free online Product Recall checker to see if your portable heater or any other electrical items have been recalled. <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/product-recalls/>
- Running heaters overnight or unattended.

Our advice to not run heaters overnight or unattended is the safest policy to adopt. The safest heater is one that is unplugged (just don't step on the plug). However, we understand that if your feeling cold and vulnerable you may be tempted to ignore this advice. We still want you to be as safe as possible and there are things that you can do to reduce the risks.

- Choose a heater that has a relatively low risk in terms of igniting any items nearby, such as an oil filled radiator.
- Ensure that any combustible items such as paper, bedding curtains and furniture are at least 1 metre away from the heater.
- Make sure your route is clear; place the heater out of the way, you do not want to trip over the lead or the heater if you need to get up in the middle of the night.
- Smoke alarms and heat detectors are essential in keeping you safe by raising the alarm in the event of a fire. There should be a minimum of one alarm/detector per floor and enough to cover all areas where a fire could start, and make sure they are tested regularly.

Alternatively, warm the room before going to bed. An oil filled radiator will heat the room for quite a while after being turned off.

COMMUNITY ALERT

Stop Scams UK – 159

STOP HANG UP CALL 159

If you think someone is trying to trick you into handing over money or personal details on the phone - stop, hang up and call 159 to speak directly to your bank for advice.

How it works

159 works in the same way as 101 for the police or 111 for the NHS. It's the number you can trust to get you through to your bank safely and securely, every time. So if you think someone is trying to trick you into handing over money or personal details - stop, hang up and call 159 to speak directly to your bank.

Who can use 159? The banks that currently use 159 are:

Barclays	Bank of Scotland	Co-operative Bank	First Direct	Halifax
HSBC	Lloyds	Metro Bank	Nationwide Building Society	
NatWest	Royal Bank of Scotland	Santander	Starling Bank	
Tide	TSB	Ulster Bank		

The telephone companies involved in 159 are:

BT (including EE and Plusnet)	Gamma	O2 (including giffgaff)	Sky
TalkTalk	Three	Virgin Media	Vodafone

For more information please visit: <https://stopscamsuk.org.uk/159>

If you have been scammed or duped into contracting with a business or a trader and parted with money, please report to **Citizens Advice Consumer Advice Line on 0808 223 1133** or go to the following website to report online:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/if-you-need-more-help-about-a-consumer-issue/>

Was this bulletin helpful?

Contact Trading Standards to request a free door sticker advising cold callers that they are not welcome. If you are a victim of scam mail, contact us to receive a free copy of our toolkit on how to avoid falling victim and how to stop the letters.

Additionally, please let us know what you think of this bulletin and what Trading Standards topics you would like to see covered in future editions.

Contact Trading Standards:

Tel: 020 8407 1311

Email: trading.standards@croydon.gov.uk

Citizens Advice Consumer Service:

Tel: 0808 223 1133

Web: www.citizensadvice.org.uk