

Information Network Bulletin

Edition 4 - 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.

Doorstep Crime and Rogue Traders

The recent storms and bad weather have seen an increase in rogue traders carrying out unsafe, unskilled and fraudulent roofing work. Some crimes have been facilitated via the traditional unsolicited cold calling style door knock, others have been found on online trader platforms.



Please be aware that not all online third party trader platforms and websites carry out any meaningful checks. There are some very well-known platforms that advertise heavily on television and the radio that purport to carry out certain checks on traders but this does not always translate into checks that can actually establish if a trader is genuine or not.

Many rogue traders set up companies that appear on Companies House but no checks are completed to ensure they have the relevant skills to carry out the work or that they actually exist at the addresses they use for their businesses.

Please do not engage with ANY person who calls unsolicited at your door and offers to do work or points out you have a problem that urgently needs fixing.

ALWAYS get several quotes in writing before having any work done, ensure you have time to think about it about the quote and ensure the companies or traders are legitimate by finding traders using **Approved Trader Schemes** such as:

Trust Mark - www.trustmark.org.uk/find-a-tradesman - 0333 555 1234

Buy With Confidence – www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk – 01392 383 430

Which? Trusted Traders - <http://trustedtraders.which.co.uk/> - 0117 405 4689

For further information please see the Croydon Trading Standards web link below:

<https://www.croydon.gov.uk/advice/tstandards/busadvice/taschemes>

If you need to report a rogue trader please contact the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133 or do it online at :

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/report-to-trading-standards/>

Shopping Online Checklist

There are a several checks you can do when shopping online to avoid problems or scams. Find out about your consumer rights when buying from companies or sellers online. You can get information from:

- Citizens Advice - online advice and the consumer service
- your local Citizens Advice office
- Which?
- Martin Lewis's Money Saving Expert website

Some advice given on social media may not be qualified or regulated advice. Being given incorrect advice could make your problem worse. Think about why you are buying the item online and answer the following questions. These suggestions may help you feel more confident when shopping online.

- **Do I know who the seller is?** (This is the trader/ company/ seller)
- **Can I find their trading address?** The trader should give a geographical address rather than a PO Box address. Also, if the item is coming from the EU, you may have additional charges. This is information a company or trader must give.
- **What is the total cost of the item?** There may be fees such as VAT, delivery, returns and possible customs fees.
- **Who is responsible for the cost of returning the item?** Lots of companies provide free return postage, but don't assume this is always the case. If the item is faulty, damaged or misdescribed, you can ask the seller to arrange a collection and either refund or place the item.
- **Do they provide information about returning or cancelling the item?** You should be given information about your cancellation or return rights. You automatically get a 14-day 'cooling-off period' when you buy something you haven't seen in person. There are some exceptions, such as bespoke items or something that will deteriorate quickly (flowers or food items, for example.) The cooling-off period starts the day after you receive your order.
- **When will it be delivered?** Try to arrange to be home when the parcel is being delivered. This will help to avoid parcels that go missing. Alternatively, you can arrange to use drop off zones listed as available, such as a nearby post office or shop. If you indicate a safe space to leave the item if anything should happen to it, it will be your responsibility, not the responsibility of the seller or delivery company.
- **Who do you complain to if a parcel goes missing, doesn't arrive or is damaged?** Your contract is with the company you bought the item from, so any problems should be addressed to the company, not the delivery company. If the company tells you to do this, it is wrong. They are responsible for the delivery of the item.
- **Could you visit a store and buy the item?** Depending on the item, it might be more convenient to visit the store and check the item or try on clothes.
- **Does the website offer a complaints process or a mediation service?** A mediation service is useful if you have a problem with an online marketplace seller that you find difficult to resolve.
- **Could it be a scam?** There is often a risk that a website could be a cloned version of a genuine company, be it a short term pop up or a scammer operating on an online marketplace. Look at top tips and guidance about recognising potential scams. Scams Action service, Citizens Advice, and Get Safe online (purchase and payments section.) can provide information about this.
www.getsafeonline.org/personal/article-category/shopping-banking/

To report an online scam or get further advice from Citizens Advice Scams Action Service, call 0808 223 1133, or you can talk to an adviser online.

www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/check-if-something-might-be-a-scam/

Top tips when buying Green Heating and Insulation

Installing the right green heating and insulation products can make your home more energy efficient and cosy.

To help you make more informed decisions about which green heating and insulation best meets your needs the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has published guidance to hi-light your main consumer rights.

Before you buy

Know your budget for green heating and insulation and understand how your home's unique needs. Green heating and insulation come with various features such as cavity wall insulation, heat pump, solar panels, biomass boiler.

- Check the government website to see if you are eligible for any funding to help save costs (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/find-energy-grants-for-you-home-help-to-heat>)
- Check consumer advice bodies and independent sources to compare products and features
- Always fact check any claims and ask the installers questions. They should be able to explain their products in words you can understand
- Check to see if you need to inform your home insurer, mortgage provider or local authority about any installation you are making.

Installation

- Find an installer certified by a trusted scheme, eg Trustmark or MCS
- Try to get at least 3 quotes
- Make sure you consider any maintenance and running costs, understand the installation process and potential disruption



The installer should give you a written contract which should include:

- The total price
- The timeline
- The products you getting



Check you are happy with everything before you and remember to check your cancellation rights.

After installation

The installer should show you how the product works and give you any instruction manuals, familiarise yourself with these.

Understand any warranties and guarantees and what you need to do to maintain them. If there are issues contact the installer first and if these are unresolved reach out to the certification schemes that the installer belongs to for assistance.

- Choose a trusted installer
- Check if you're eligible for government funding
- Know your consumer rights

Find out more at the Competition & Markets Authority website at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/buying-green-heating-and-insulation-products-consumer-guide/buying-green-heating-and-insulation-products-a-consumer-guide>

Be Aware of Romance Fraud

Romance frauds happen when the victim thinks they've met the perfect partner through an online dating website or app or via email or phone, but the other person is using a fake profile and identity to form a relationship with them. They gain the victim's trust and ask them for money using some made up but believable reason or enough personal information to steal their identity.

Romance fraudsters are masters of manipulation and will go to great lengths to create a false reality in which an individual feels that they are making reasonable and rational decisions. The challenge for many family and friends of romance fraud victims is being able to disrupt the false reality created to enable the victim to see the situation for what it really is – a fraud.

Top Tips

It is important that no matter how long you've been speaking to someone online and how much you think you trust them, if you have not met them in person it's important that you do not:

Send them any money

- Allow them access to your bank account
- Transfer money on their behalf
- Take out a loan for them
- Provide copies of your personal documents such as passports or driving licences
- Invest your own money on their behalf or on their advice
- Purchase and send the codes on gift cards such as Amazon or iTunes
- Agree to receive and/or send parcels on their behalf (laptops, mobile phones etc.)

In 2022, TSB carried out a survey of their customers who had been victims of romance fraud. They found that 51 to 65-year-olds spent by far the most money on their 'relationships', meaning this age group accounted for 46% of financial losses.

In three-fifths (60%) of all romance fraud cases analysed by TSB in 2022, scammers asked for financial help with bills, or daily living costs.

Some had specific stories about needing medical help, home improvements or car maintenance, while others asked for money to help them "get by".

One in six (21%) claimed they were stuck abroad and needed help supporting themselves while they tried to find a way home.

Claiming to work on an oil rig appeared to be a frequently used ploy, the bank found.

Nearly one in 10 (8%) cases involved scammers being sent money to book travel to be with their victim – trips they would never make.

If you believe you have been the victim of a romance fraud please contact your bank and make them aware. If you need to report a fraud, please report this to the police. If you think you have been a victim of a romance scam, do not feel ashamed or embarrassed - you are not alone. Contact your bank immediately and report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or via www.actionfraud.police.uk

For further advice please view the information compiled by Action Fraud:

<https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/a-z-of-fraud/dating-fraud>





The sale of second hand cars have always attracted more than their fair share of complaints from dissatisfied purchasers. Although consumers should always have realistic expectations about used cars, they are entitled to expect a vehicle which at minimum is as described.

The days when second cars were sold solely from forecourts have long since gone, and consumers will now usually find them for sale online - on dealer and third part websites, but now often on Facebook and other social media sites.

Unfortunately, far too many purchasers of vehicles do not obtain the particulars of the seller. An email address and/or telephone number is never sufficient in the event of issues arising with the car. Sellers will decline to give their geographical address, and will often arrange to meet with the prospective purchaser at a site away from their residence.

Even purchasing vehicles from the big online market places such as Autotrader is not necessary a guarantee for being able to contact the seller in the event of a dispute, as checks on the advertiser have to be robust, and we have had seen at least one example where this was not done.

Prospective purchasers will also be aware that the recent economic downturn, together with the short-age of critical parts for new cars, has resulted in sharply increased costs of used vehicles causing consumers to look for supposed bargains at the lower end of the market.

Even when purchasing a relatively cheap used car, a consumer is entitled to expect a car of satisfactory quality. Satisfactory quality means that the vehicle you purchase should be of a standard that a reasonable person would expect, taking into account a number of factors including the vehicle's history, age and value.

However, for example, an old car with a high mileage cannot be expected to be as good as a newer car with lower mileage, but should still be fit for the road. Similarly, it is likely that an older car will have minor defects in appearance and finish, and wear and tear must be expected reflecting its age.

Full advice on what to look for and what to expect when purchasing a cheap used car can be found at: <https://www.croydon.gov.uk/business-licences-and-tenders/trading-standards/trading-standards-consumer-advice-and-guidelines/consumer-advice-goods-services-and-safety-recalls/advice-and-support-citizens-advice>

but in summary –

- Insist on proof of identity from whom you purchase your vehicle
- Manage your expectations when purchasing a cheap used car, but
- Make sure you understand your rights

If you have any issues after purchasing a car, for full civil advice you should initially call the Citizens Advice Consumer Service (CACS) on 0808 223 1133.

Car finance complaints & Discretionary commission arrangements



Some car finance customers may have been charged too much on their loans.

Before January 2021, some lenders allowed brokers (the person that arranges the loan, for example, your car dealer) to adjust the interest rates they offered customers for car finance.

Typically, the higher the interest rate, the more commission the broker received. This was known as a **discretionary commission arrangement**.

Discretionary commission arrangements created an incentive for brokers to increase how much people were charged for their car loan.

This practice was banned in 2021. But there have since been a high number of complaints from customers about how much they were charged before the ban. Providers (lenders and brokers) are rejecting most of these complaints, because they believe they haven't acted unfairly and haven't caused customers to lose out.

The **Financial Conduct Authority** are assessing the extent of the problem to make sure that, if you are owed compensation, you get it in the best way possible.

This applies to you if:

- you used car finance to buy a motor vehicle, for example a car, van, campervan or motorbike, before 28 January 2021 (this includes hire purchase agreements, such as Personal Contract Purchases) your lender and broker had a discretionary commission arrangement

This doesn't apply if:

- you used car finance to buy a car on or after 28 January 2021
- you used a hire agreement, such as a Personal Contract Hire

What the Financial Conduct Authority are doing

Pausing the complaints process

The FCA are examining the issue to make sure that, if you're owed compensation, you get it in the best way possible. In the meantime, the FCA are pausing the 8-week deadline for providers to respond to complaints about car finance involving this type of commission. **You can still complain to your provider, but they will not have to respond to your complaint until after 25 September 2024, at the earliest.**

Car finance complaints & Discretionary commission arrangements (cont...)

It's important that any complaints are dealt with by providers in a consistent, efficient and orderly way. Given the high number of possible complaints, there's a risk this might not happen.

Managing this risk is important because this borrowing isn't covered by the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. This means if complaints aren't dealt with in an orderly way and your provider goes out of business, you may not get the money you're owed.

Giving you longer to refer your complaint

If you're unhappy with a response you've had from your provider to this type of complaint, we're giving you longer to take your complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Usually, you have to take your complaint to the Financial Ombudsman within 6 months of getting a final response from your provider, but the **FCA are extending this by up to 15 months if you were sent a final response between 12 July 2023 and 20 November 2024.**

You may be unsure whether you were charged too much on your car loan. Your provider should be able to tell you if they used a discretionary commission arrangement on your car finance.

Once the FCA have more information, they will decide the best way to get compensation to people who've lost out. It's important that you complain within the time limit.

Generally, you need to complain to your provider within 6 years of the problem happening or, if later, within 3 years from when you became aware or ought reasonably to have become aware that you had cause to complain.

If you think you could be running out of time, you should consider complaining to your provider now.

Making a complaint

It's free and simple to complain to your provider and the Financial Ombudsman if you're unhappy with a financial product or service. The Financial Ombudsman has information about making a complaint and car finance complaints. And if you're concerned about the process, you can get free guidance from MoneyHelper.

<https://www.moneyhelper.org.uk/en/contact-us/money-guidance>



A claims management company (CMC) can make a complaint for you, but you'll have to pay a fee.

Once you've made a complaint, your provider will have until 20 November 2024 to respond (unless the FCA extend this deadline). If you're unhappy with their response, or you don't hear from them by this date, you can then complain to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

It's important you contact the Financial Ombudsman Service by the date given in your provider's final response letter, or they may not be able to help.

Find out more at

<https://www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk/consumers/complaints-can-help/credit-borrowing-money/car-finance/complaints-about-commission>

<https://www.fca.org.uk/consumers/car-finance-complaints>



Buying a Car Privately? Tread with care!

Croydon Trading Standards continue to warn residents to be alert to the dangers of buying through social media. It open to misuse, with fraudsters opening accounts in false names, hiding their true whereabouts, etc.

Recently we have received reports concerning cars purchased via Gumtree and Facebook Marketplace, both of which have proved to be costly mistakes for the innocent buyers.

In the first instance, the buyer paid for the car but did not then receive a logbook for it. When he contacted the DVLA about this, he was advised not to use the vehicle as logbook was fraudulent and the car had probably been stolen.

In the second case, the purchaser had been driving the car they had bought for some time and had wanted to MOT it prior to selling it on. When they looked at the MOT online, they saw the last mileage was higher than on their car. On contacting the DVLA they found that there is a second car with the same registration, so one of them has been cloned.

Both of the above sales are being investigated by the DVLA and the Police.

Croydon Trading Standards reminds residents that when goods are bought privately, you do not have the same legal protection that you would as a consumer buying from a trader.

To access a range of consumer advice, go to <https://www.gov.uk/consumer-protection-rights>

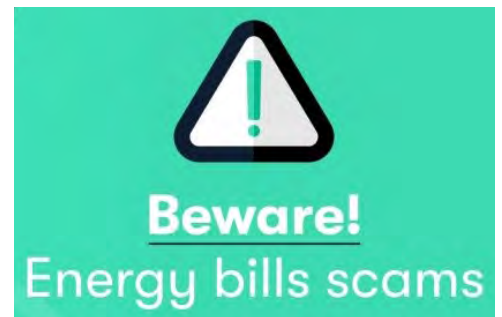
Energy Scams Prey on Cost of Living Crisis

Sadly, there are lots of different energy scams circulating at present. Below is an example of one to be aware of:

1. Someone contacts you pretending to be from Ofgem. This could be by phone, text message or a doorstep visit.
2. They claim that they can save you money by helping you to switch to a cheaper tariff or provider.
3. Then they will ask for your card or bank details to complete the switch.
4. The fraudsters will use your details to make payments on your card; and once they have this information, criminals may try to get more money from you.
5. Later, they will call you, pretending to be from your bank. They'll tell you that there has been fraudulent activity on your account to trick you into moving your money into the 'safe account that they have opened for you, where the fraudsters can't get to it.
6. Once you transfer the money to the 'safe account', it will be in the hands of the fraudsters!

To keep your money safe remember:

- **Ofgem is an energy regulator.** They don't sell energy and won't ask for personal information or visit your property.
- **Check the government's website.** You'll find information on all the energy schemes they offer.
- **Check it's genuine before making payments or sharing information.** Always contact your energy supplier on a publicly available number or one on their website
- **Think before you click on a link and share personal or financial information.** Criminals can make emails, texts, and calls look like they are from a genuine company.
- **Never move your money to a new account for security reasons.** If anyone asks you to do this, it will be a scam.



Citizens Advice Consumer Service



Many consumer problems can be rectified at an early stage if the right approach is taken and do not necessarily need to be reported to Trading Standards.

In the first instance, if you have an issue with a trader or business, please visit the Citizens Advice Consumer Advice website:

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

You can also call the Citizens Advice consumer helpline: 0808 223 1133

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Lines are closed on bank holidays.

There is a lot of information on the website in regards to what action you can take as a consumer to resolve simple consumer issues and if you need to take matters further, there is advice on how to go about making a small claim.

Small claims are for simple cases that don't involve large amounts of money or complicated issues. They're often used to get compensation or your money back if something's gone wrong. Small claims are never usually for more than £10,000.

You can use small claims for things like:

- a faulty product
- poor service
- being owed a refund
- disputes with your landlord - for example, if they haven't done minor repairs
- being owed money for work you've done
- accidents when you've been injured - for example, a car accident
- Before you start a small claim, try to solve the problem another way if you can - for example, by making a complaint or using formal mediation.

You can check out advice on solving consumer problems, including how to use 'alternative dispute resolution'. This can involve mediation and is a way of trying to solve problems without going to court.

For ease we have provided some useful links below including directions to template letters and advice on small claims which can assist you taking the appropriate action.

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/get-more-help/Solve-an-ongoing-consumer-problem/>

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/template-letters/letters/>

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**