

From mountain to sea

# Trading Standards Bulletin

## Bulletin No. 60

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.

### **Doorstep Crime/ Cold Calling**

Nothing to report.

### **Scams etc.**

#### **Council Services Scam**

One resident of north Aberdeenshire recently reported to Trading Standards that she had been receiving telephone calls and texts from a company which claimed to help customers with their energy, council tax and utility bills. The company name, as provided, included the words 'Aberdeenshire Council'. They also claimed to the resident to be working on behalf of Aberdeenshire Council.

The truth of the matter is that this is a scam and there is no such company working on behalf of the Council. Should you be contacted by such a company claiming to work for or with Aberdeenshire Council, please try to note who the callers are (company name, contact details etc.), what services they're offering, what the costs of these services are and how they got your details (it's unclear yet how they got this resident's details). Please DO NOT disclose any further personal information to these callers or any financial information at all, simply hang up. If you receive such messages via text then, if you can, forward the text to 7726, the spam text service number for telephony companies to collate and block numbers which they believe are spammers or scammers.

Please then report the matter to Trading Standards using the contact information at the end of this bulletin, so that we can investigate the matter.

#### **Purchase scam**

One resident in the Formartine area recently reported that in mid-Summer he had had double glazing fitted around his home. Whilst chatting to one of the workmen, this workman advised the resident that he re-covered doors for customers, in his own time. It was later agreed that the workman could re-cover the resident's oak doors, a price was agreed and the money, which amounted to

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several hundred pounds, was paid to the workman by direct bank transfer. A couple of weeks later the workman arrived at the resident's home and removed the doors for re-covering at the workman's workshop in Dundee. Several weeks passed without word from the workman so the resident tried to contact him directly, but without receiving any response. The resident later got in touch with the double glazing firm who had fitted his new windows to make contact through them but was advised that the workman no longer worked there. To date, the doors and payment are still outstanding although enquiries continue. In all likelihood the money has been spent and the doors sold.

Should you have any workmen at your home who offer to provide a similar service quite apart from the one they are there to provide, particularly if the items to be upcycled have to be taken from your home, politely thank those concerned and decline their offer. Far safer to initiate your own inquiries with businesses who you have a confirmed bricks and mortar address for, as, if things go awry you will have legal protections under the Consumer Contract Regulations 2013, which we have discussed in previous bulletins (such as Bulletin 54).

Should anyone be offered such a service we would be obliged if they could note the workman's details a report it to Trading Standards and/or Police Scotland. If you fall foul of such a scam, please also remember to make complaint to your bank, to see if they can reimburse you through the Authorised Push Payments (APP) Scams Voluntary Code which many banks have been partners in since its introduction in 2019. It's unlikely that these types of scammers will accept payment by credit card but would prefer payment in cash, cheque or direct transfer into their bank account. Remember with cash payments, unless you obtain a receipt, you will have no proof of payment. Also, cheques will provide you with a breathing space of a few days to reconsider the matter, in the time between when the cheque is issued and when it's cashed.

### Trusted Trader schemes etc.

Trading Standards were recently contacted by staff at one of the trusted trader schemes to advise that they had become aware that a tradesman in Aberdeenshire was advertising online that he was a member of that scheme, when in fact he wasn't. He had been a member but had been removed from the scheme due to poor workmanship which had generated complaints.

Traders advertising that they are members of a trusted trader scheme may be committing an offence under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008, as consumers who see the adverts may believe that by being a member of the scheme that the trader's workmanship is of a higher standard or that they abide by the scheme's code of conduct regarding complaints etc. so choose that trader because, even in part, of the advert.



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If you become aware of a trader who is falsely advertising membership of any trusted trader scheme, trade body or code of conduct when they are not, we would ask that you report this matter to Trading Standards, to allow us to investigate and take the appropriate action. Contact details for Trading Standards are at the end of this bulletin.

### **Misc.**

One resident of south Aberdeenshire was recently gifted an older digital single lens reflex (DSLR) camera from a friend. To get the best use of the camera, the resident went online and made an internet search for the camera manual and found it on the website of a company based in Ireland. The company asked for a payment of only £1.49 for downloading a copy of the manual. Thinking this was a reasonable amount, the resident paid the charge and downloaded the manual.

Several days later whilst checking his bank statement, the resident realised that there was an additional charge of £24.90 from this company to his account, which was unauthorised. The resident reported the matter to his bank and made a complaint. Whilst doing so, he learned that the company had not only taken the unauthorised charge but had also set up a monthly subscription for the same amount, also without his consent. Thankfully, the bank cancelled the subscription and sought a refund from the company.

It would appear that the information about the subscription was buried deep within the small print of the manual's web page where it was not readily visible. In fairness, it did say so on the company's 'Home' web page, but the internet search took the resident directly to the manual's web page. For that reason, details of the automatic application of the subscription should have been clearly visible on the manual's web page too so that consumers can make an informed choice before making a purchase.

This is not the first time we've come upon instances like this where a small upfront payment lead to an unauthorised subscription and it underscores the need to check bank statements regularly; to query any unusual transactions with your bank and to stop any unauthorised subscriptions as soon as possible, as recouping the money from the company may prove very, very difficult, especially if they're based abroad.

### **Conclusion**

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with a scenario such as the ones discussed here

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where fear, panic and alarm are often tools used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time. Remember, after the initial panic is over, you may have rights which Trading Standards can help you with. We can also help you with advice about any article mentioned in these bulletins.

If you have been the victim of a Doorstep Crime or an attempted crime, whether Bogus Caller or Rogue Trader, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can build a detailed, ongoing picture of the activities of these scammers throughout 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 or to Keep It Out at <https://keep-it-out.co.uk/anonymous-reporting/>

### **Contact Info**

For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://www.consumeradvice.scot/> or 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](mailto:tradingstandards@aberdeencity.gov.uk)

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

For more information about scams please visit Friends Against Scams at <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/> or Take Five at <https://takefive-stopfraud.org.uk/>

Please direct any media queries to [news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk) or 01467 538222 during office hours.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found at: <http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/trading-standards-crime-and-scams-bulletin>