

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Bulletin

Bulletin No. 62

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.

Cold Calling

Nothing to report.

Scams etc.

Apple Vouchers scam

One resident of north Aberdeenshire was recently contacted via a popular social medium from someone purporting to be his distant cousin who he only has occasional contact with and only through this social medium. The 'cousin' claimed to have won £100,000 in a competition and claimed to have seen the resident's name on the winners list too. The cousin also advised that the resident would be hearing from a rep of the competition in the near future about his winnings.

A few days later, the resident did hear from someone claiming to be a rep from the competition. The rep only gave her name but no further contact information. She confirmed that the resident had indeed won a substantial amount of money but that he would have to pay taxes on this money by buying Apple vouchers and sending the serial numbers on to the rep in lieu of payment, all of which he did. These vouchers cost the resident several hundred pounds from a local shop.

After that, all communications from the rep stopped, there was no prize forthcoming and the resident realised that he had been scammed, so reported the matter to Trading Standards and to his bank. The truth of the matter of course was:

- It was indeed a scam
- The 'cousin' who contacted the resident was probably the rep, who had also hacked the cousin's social medium account
- The 'cousin' angle was used simply to give some credibility to the scam
- The £100,000 was simply the 'hook' to capture the resident

From mountain to sea

- Apple had nothing to do with the scam but their vouchers were simply the medium misused to perpetrate it
- Although the resident was left with the physical vouchers, all the scammer needed was the serial numbers to realise the monetary value of the vouchers
- Tax authorities DO NOT accept payment in Apple vouchers or anything similar. They will usually only accept cheques or online direct payments from bank accounts

The matter is still being investigated and there is a chance that the resident will be re-imbursed by the bank, but it would be worth bearing in mind the above points.

Please remember too that it is a red flag event if anyone says that payment should be made in gift vouchers for an official purpose such as paying taxes of any sort. It is likely that the whole matter is a scam, all contact should be ended by you and the matter reported to your bank, Trading Standards or Police Scotland immediately.

Car Sales scam

Trading Standards were recently contacted by a resident in the Banff & Buchan area who advised that he had recently bought a car for a four figure sum via a popular online marketplace but had been shocked at what he had later found out.

The resident had seen the car on the marketplace and due to the low mileage and apparently good condition, had contacted the seller for more information. Information and videos were exchanged via a texting service and the resident subsequently bought the car, paying the seller by direct bank transfer. Arrangements were then made for the handover of the car during which the following red flags appeared:

- The resident and the seller arranged to meet at a neutral car park far from the resident's home address (in the Central Belt)
- It was dark when this handover took place, so there was no opportunity to properly inspect the car
- The seller promised the resident that there were two ignition keys, one was handed over with the other one apparently being in the car
- There was no paperwork handed over from the seller to the resident
- When the resident did have a chance to check the car over, he found that the front bumper was misaligned and the windscreen wipers did not work properly

From mountain to sea

- The resident later made some enquiries about the vehicle, once he got it home, only to find that it had previously sustained serious accident damage (which the seller had never mentioned). This called a 'Category S' motor vehicle
- The resident had only a mobile number and an e-mail address for the seller and when he started to raise queries about the car, the seller blocked his number. When the resident e-mailed the seller, the seller denied that he had sold the car. It appears that the seller had misused a genuine garage's e-mail address

There can be no doubt that any number of the above points should have set alarm bells ringing in the resident's mind. It was truly a case of 'too good to be true' and that the car concerned was 'a lemon'. Some points to consider when buying a car:

- Be extremely cautious about buying vehicles via online marketplaces or social media. Scammers proliferate on these platforms, just looking for victims
- Never part with money until you have had a chance to examine thoroughly what you are buying
- Ask the seller for the make, model, registration number and latest MOT test number of the vehicle you're considering
- Use the www.gov.uk link to check the background of the vehicle you're considering, to check official data about the vehicle
- Use a reliable source such as the [RAC](http://www.rac.co.uk) or the [AA](http://www.aa.com) (click on the links) to check other data about the vehicle which may not be held on the www.gov.uk website. There may be a small fee for these but better than losing thousands on a car
- Obtain as much information about the seller as possible, including name, address, post code, e-mail address and land line. Try to verify as much of this information as you can by searching online, calling their number during the negotiations, so that if something goes wrong later, you are able to trace the seller
- When you go to view the vehicle, take someone with you who is knowledgeable about vehicles
- Try to see the vehicle at the address the seller provided you with, in daylight so you and your second can examine the vehicle properly
- Ask to see the V5C certificate, commonly called a 'log book'. Ensure the details about the vehicle are accurate with what you have in front of you and that the seller's details tally with the information they previously gave you

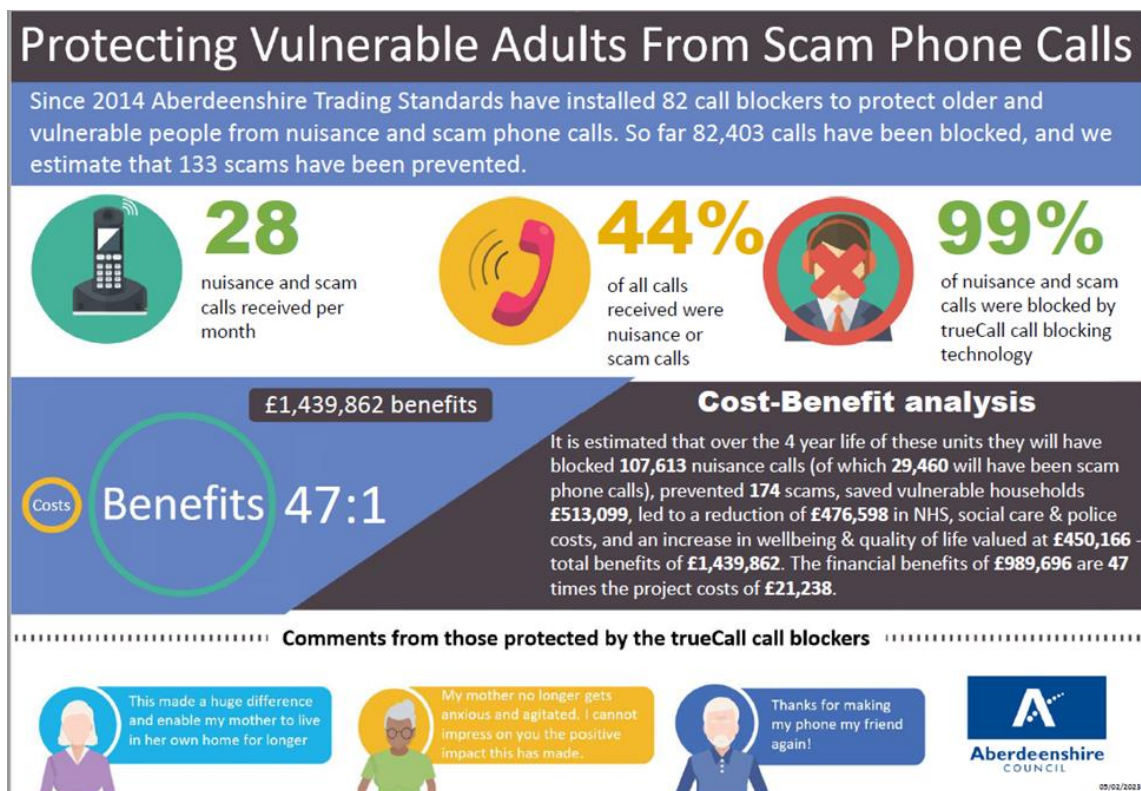
From mountain to sea

- If you decide to buy the vehicle, and it's from a business or someone purporting to be a business, always obtain a proper receipt and the V5C certificate
- If you decide to buy the vehicle and pay by direct bank transfer, you'll need the bank details of the seller to pay them. Keep this information safe in case there are problems further down the line
- If you decide to buy the vehicle, remember to have insurance in place before you drive it home and tax it immediately when you do get it home

Where the seller cannot satisfy the points immediately above, then consider walking away from the deal. The more points they cannot satisfy, the stronger the case of walking away. Remember, lemons leave a bitter taste.

Misc.

Some information we thought you might find interesting about call blockers which Aberdeenshire Trading Standards have provided to residents:



If you know someone who is classed as vulnerable and who is being pestered by high pressure sales calls, scam calls and such, you can contact [trueCall](#) (click

From mountain to sea

the link) to find out more or contact Trading Standards using the details at the bottom of this bulletin.

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 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

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/>



From mountain to sea

Please direct any media queries to 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>