

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 107

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 so please feel free to share the contents with friends, family, neighbours or any community groups you are a part of. For details of scams reported in other parts of Scotland please click on the [Trading Standards Scotland Bulletin page](#).

Bogus Callers and Rogue Traders

Nothing to report.



Scams etc.

Social Media scam

We recently learned of a local resident who was contacted by an apparently Thai male on TikTok and befriended by him. The male gave his name as Lucas and claimed to be living in the USA, with a daughter who was living in Germany. Lucas also claimed to regularly send small parcels over to his daughter.



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Lucas advised that he would also like to send the resident a gift but that she would have to pay the local import taxes, which she agreed to do.

A few days later, the resident received a message on WhatsApp, apparently from a delivery service advising that they had the package from Lucas and would deliver it as soon as the 'tax duty fee' of £500 was paid. Details of the account to which the payment was to be made was also included in the message as well as instructions to use the payment reference "Family Support".

The resident then tried to make the payment but it was stopped by her bank as there was a major discrepancy between the name of the account holder and the name she had tried to use.

A short time later, another message was sent by the delivery service with instructions to make the payment to a completely different account. This message also advised that the parcel had been scanned by 'the security agency' and a large sum of cash had been detected within. The message also said that the resident should contact the sender (Lucas) and request that he provide her with an 'anti-terrorist certificate' and that if Lucas couldn't, the delivery service could – for a fee of £1000 and details of her 'government issued ID'.

The delivery service also sent a screenshot showing that the original payment had been blocked along with details of a new bank account for the payment for the 'anti-terrorist certificate' payment to be paid into (except that this was a personal account with an address given in the south of England) and again instructions to use the reference "Family Support".

It was at this point that the resident realised that this was a scam and reported the matter to Trading Standards.

Some points to consider:

- This would appear to be a romance scam, where the resident was contacted by a man on the pretext of wooing her, but his real motivation was deception and fraud,
- It should be noted that neither TikTok nor WhatsApp took any active part in the scam; their services were simply misused by the scammer,
- Undoubtedly, the majority if not all of what 'Lucas' told the resident was fictitious. He may not have been Thai, been living in the USA, with a daughter in Germany or that his name really was Lucas. All initial contact was conducted via TikTok where he could have hidden his true location and all else might have been made up,
- It was almost certain that there had been no parcel sent by Lucas to the resident and that he was in fact also the 'delivery service', who had been



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- lying about the parcel and the duty fee and what 'Lucas' was actually trying to do was to cheat the resident out of the £500 payment,
- The mention of the large amount of cash in the parcel was simply a further hook, to further manipulate the resident into parting with the £500,
 - The 'anti-terrorist certificate' (which does not exist in the UK) fee of £1000 was also fictitious and an additional way in which Lucas was trying to cheat the resident out of even more money,
 - Vague, generic terms like 'tax duty fee', 'the security agency' and 'government issued ID' (which are not terms in common use in the UK) are suggestive of messages which did not come from a UK based service and which would be sent to people in different countries who each have different terms for similar things, thereby also indicating that the sender is contacting large numbers of people, not just a small number,
 - The final bank account details, apparently from a business, but asking for a payment into a personal account was the final red flag to the resident that something was amiss,
 - The information held on a passport is highly sensitive data and great care should be used as to who this is shared with. It should only be shared with agencies who you are certain are genuine, otherwise this would be another red flag,
 - Undoubtedly, the holder of all of the bank accounts quoted, although in different names and with different banks, would have led back to 'Lucas',
 - Love does work in mysterious ways but our advice is that if someone contacts you out of the blue on social media trying to become your suitor, please proceed with caution and treat the situation with scepticism; don't let your heart rule your head,
 - If that person then starts to talk about money, particularly about moving sums of money from the object of the affection to the suitor, for whatever reason, it may be time to end all contact and block them.

Romance scams are a much under-reported issue so please also, if you can, report these sorts of scams to Trading Standards so that we can monitor the situation and offer advice and assistance.

Misc.

Trading Standards frequently receive reports from consumers around Aberdeenshire who have made payments to scammers via direct bank transfers to scammers via their bank accounts. This method of payment is an example of what is often referred to as an authorised push payment and where the payment is made to a scammer, it is called an authorised push payment fraud.



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In the past, where transactions like have taken place and then been reported to the customer's bank, the reactions of the banks has varied somewhat due to varying policies on the matter, leading to differing outcomes for customers in whether they were compensated by their bank for the money lost or by to what degree.

On Monday 7th October 2024, new rules came into force meaning that all banks and building societies in the UK must now compensate their customers for all of the money lost unless it can be shown that the customer was careless or grossly negligent.

An excellent article featured on Martin Lewis's Money Saving Expert website soon after the changeover (and should have been featured in this bulletin sooner – apologies!) explaining the changes and is well worth a read. It can be found [here](#).

Conclusion

Please note that the advice given in these bulletins has been deliberately kept simple, so that if you are faced with such a scenario where fear, alarm and panic are tools often used deliberately by scammers, you will know what to do at that time.

If you have been the victim of a Bogus Caller or other form of scam, please report the matter to Consumer Advice Scotland so that Trading Standards can maintain a detailed picture about scammers operating in 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.

Contact Info

For non-urgent Trading Standards enquiries in Aberdeenshire, please contact the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them 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



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

For more information about scams please visit the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

Please direct any media queries to news@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or 01467 538222 during office hours.

All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).