

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 128

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.

Protecting Our Community

Kingdom Coatings

Aberdeenshire Trading Standards continue to receive complaints from residents in the Peterhead and Oldmeldrum areas about the Stirling based company Kingdom Coatings.

These latest complaints again involve employees allegedly ignoring 'No Cold Calling' stickers, pushy sales tactics and ignoring repeated requests by residents for these employees to leave them alone.

Trading Standards Officers are actively investigating. If you have had similar issues with Kingdom Coatings, please contact us on 01467 537222 or via the e-mail address trading.standards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Please also stay vigilant and look out for your neighbours.

Scams etc.

Booking Scam

One resident of the Formartine area reported that she recently booked tickets in Aberdeen for a night out in the Spring. She also booked accommodation at a nearby hotel via the same booking agency.

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Several days later she received two messages via WhatsApp, claiming to be from the hotel. The messages contained a hyperlink and the resident was asked to click on the link to confirm her booking. Fearing that she might lose her accommodation booking, the resident immediately clicked on the link and started to input her details, including her bank card details, to save her booking.

As luck would have it, the resident's mobile phone signal dropped at that moment, preventing her from completing the request. While she was waiting for the signal to return, her rational brain kicked in. She then called the hotel concerned and spoke to a member of staff there who confirmed that the hotel did not send out the WhatsApp messages, that her booking was secure and that other customers had also been contacted with similar messages.

The resident subsequently concluded that it was all a scam and reported the matter to her bank and to Trading Standards.

In more detail, the WhatsApp messages had advised that the purpose of the messages was a reservation review and that the resident might see a temporary authorisation for a sum of £150 but not to worry about it as it would be deleted automatically. The message also asked that the resident confirm her reservation within 24 hours to keep it and that any queries should be addressed by simply replying to the message. These WhatsApp messages came from a phone number with the prefix of +31 6, suggesting that they came from a mobile phone number in the Netherlands. By chance(?), the booking agency used is also based in the Netherlands.

Some points to consider:

- WhatsApp was not actively involved in this scam; its services were simply misused by the scammers to try to cheat people,
- The most likely conclusion to be made is that the scammers obtained the resident's details (and other people's) due to a data breach in the Netherlands,
- Clearly, in this instance we can see that they scammers were manipulating the resident, using tactics such as outright deception, fear (of losing her booking), urgency (to act within 24 hours) and secrecy (address any concerns by simply replying to the WhatsApp messages),
- The 'temporary' authorisation (spelt with a 'z', instead of the UK 's', further suggesting that the scammers were not British) was likely simply designed to buy time without scrutiny or bank interference for the money to land with the scammers,

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Actions (not) to take:

- Always be cautious about responding to unsolicited texts or e-mails,
- Never click on hyperlinks in unsolicited texts or e-mails as doing so may start a malware download to your device,
- Never provide your personal details, or especially your bank account or credit card information in response to unsolicited phone calls, texts or e-mails,
- Where you have concerns about an unsolicited phone call, text or e-mail, please never use the same method to respond to that message. As with this instance, where the resident received a WhatsApp message, she phoned the hotel concerned to query the matter. Simply replying to the WhatsApp message would be replying to the scammers,
- As in this instance, if you think that you've been targeted by a scammer, please report the matter to your bank and to your local Trading Standards office.

Facebook Puppy Scam

Aberdeenshire Trading Standards were recently contacted by a resident in the Kincardine area about an advert he had seen on Facebook.

The resident had been scrolling on Facebook a few days earlier and had seen an advert there about Westie puppies for sale. A photo of a Westie puppy was part of the advert. Already the resident thought that the advert could be a scam. He also noted that many commentators asked the seller where she was but none of these questions were answered.

Intrigued, he made contact with the seller via Facebook Messenger and advised that he was interested in buying a puppy. Almost the first thing the seller asked was where the resident lived, so he told 'her'. She responded by saying that her name was Charlotte and she lived in Fife.

The conversation continued and 'Charlotte' advised that the puppy would cost £650 in total but any buyer would have to place a £350 deposit in advance to reserve a puppy. Charlotte advised that she would expect payment by direct bank transfer. Charlotte also invited the resident to continue discussions via WhatsApp messages. She then provided a mobile phone number to the resident.

The resident tried calling the number but was immediately cut off. He messaged Charlotte to query this and received a response that she had recently had an ear operation and her phone was set to not accept phone calls, only text-type messages.

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The resident eventually told Charlotte that he thought she was a scammer and that he would report her and this, effectively, ended the conversation. Later, the resident did report the matter to Trading Standards.

Some points to note:

- WhatsApp and Facebook took no active part in this scam. Their services were simply used by the scammer 'Charlotte' to cheat people,
- Many scammers use Facebook to snare their victims, so any adverts seen there should be treated with the greatest caution,
- The requests to Charlotte from other Facebook users about her location, which went unanswered, should raise concerns that she deliberately did not want anyone to know her location and why,
- During the dialogue between the resident and Charlotte, it was evident that her main concern was obtaining money, another red flag,
- As the dialogue was conducted by messaging services, the resident had no idea who 'Charlotte' really was, what she looked like, where she lived and if she was even female. The complete lack of information and the discussions being conducted with no real personal contact should also be a red flag,
- It is possible that 'Charlotte' did not have any puppies for sale, that they were entirely fictitious and the photos on the advert had been lifted from other webpages or Facebook pages,
- Buying puppies from social media opens up the possibility that the prospective buyer can be scammed. Once payment has been made, the seller can then end all contact and no puppy is ever received,

Actions (not) to take:

- If you considering getting a puppy, please consider first checking with the Kennel Club at their Getting A Dog page. Click [here](#) for more information,
- It may also be useful to speak to local vets practices to see if they can point you towards reputable local breeders,
- As always, there are always homeless dogs looking for a loving home and there are a number of local charities which help to re-home dogs. Good examples are [DAWGS](#), [BARRK](#), [Mrs. Murray's](#) and, of course, the [SSPCA at Drumoak](#),
- Further advice on getting a dog can be found in previous Bulletins, at nos. 31, 33, 36, 44, 51 and 103 by clicking [here](#).

Misc.

Nothing to report.

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Stop Press

Nothing to report.

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 Consumer Advice Scotland at <https://consumeradvice.scot/contact/> or call them on 0808 164 6000.

For urgent Trading Standards matters or doorstep crime matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222 or via trading.standards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

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 the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

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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](#).