

From mountain to sea

Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 138

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.

One resident of the Banff & Buchan area recently reported to Trading Standards that in late 2025 he had seen an online video of the Money Saving Expert Martin Lewis recommending investing through a company called WhalesHub where, via Bitcoin, the resident could turn a modest amount of money into a large amount within a very short time.

The resident, who is vulnerable, unfortunately clicked on the advert and inputted his details onto the WhalesHub platform. A short time later he was contacted by an adviser called Steve who confirmed the information provided in the online video. 'Steve' also managed to persuade the resident to 'invest' several hundred pounds into this scheme via a direct bank payment.

After several weeks the resident changed his mind and contacted 'Steve' to withdraw his money. Steve was very reluctant to comply with this request, telling the resident that his investment was now worth £60,000 and growing, that it was still invested in Bitcoin as well as US Dollars.

As a result of not being able to get his money back, the resident then contacted Trading Standards. Our investigations are ongoing but raise a number of important issues about this new technology. Some points to note:

- Martin Lewis is a financial journalist, not an investment adviser. He goes to great lengths to remind people that he never gives any investment advice. Instead, he reports only on facts which are already in existence,

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- WhalesHub is, unfortunately an ‘investment platform’ well known to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). The FCA do NOT endorse WhalesHub and have in fact issued a formal warning against it. Further information about this can be found [here](#),
- Conversely, the FCA also has a list of registered and approved firms for people wishing to invest. That list can be found [here](#),
- Even a quick internet search supports the above notion that WhalesHub is an unsafe trading platform. Reviews from a number of members of the public on Trustpilot can be found [here](#),
- It would appear that the video which the resident saw was an AI deepfake, i.e. a video which may have used real footage of Martin Lewis as a basis to create a completely false, computer generated video. Undoubtedly, this would have been done without Martin Lewis’s knowledge or permission,
- Deepfake videos are sure to cause some people anxiety due to their subject’s ability to look and sound like someone else. There are certain ways which can help to try to tell the difference, such as:
 - ❖ Watch around the person’s eyes to see if shadows appear around the eyes when you expect to, or watch to see if they blink too much or too little,
 - ❖ Watch around the person’s mouth to see if the lip syncing looks natural and follows the person’s words,
 - ❖ Does their skin look too smooth or wrinkled to look natural?
 - ❖ Try the ‘three finger test’ and ask the subject to wave three fingers in front of their face. Many AI programs cannot do this without exposing themselves. See this video on [YouTube](#) to learn about it,
 - ❖ Which? magazine recently ran quite a lengthy article of how to try to identify deepfake videos. It can be found [here](#),
 - ❖ The online security company Norton has an informative webpage on the matter [here](#),
 - ❖ If still unsure, err on the side of caution and decline to do what the subject of the video asks you to do. If this person is known to you, contact them via a method that you have selected, i.e. in person, phone call, text, to query the issue. Remember to use contact information you already hold and don’t use any information provided in the video,
- As this resident had made a payment from their bank account to an account held by the scammer, this scam would qualify as an authorised push payment (APP) scam and should be reported to the victim’s bank in case they can help replace the sum lost,
- If you think you’ve been the victim of an investment scam or AI deepfake, please remember to contact your local Trading Standards office for advice and so that we can alert other people.

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Misc.

Squishy Dumplings

Over the last few weeks Aberdeenshire Trading Standards have seen a huge rise in the popularity of ‘Squishy’ or ‘Squeezy’ Dumplings toys similar to the sudden spike in popularity that we saw several months ago regarding Labubu dolls.

Squishy Dumplings are small, colourful ball-like objects with cute faces imprinted on them, which are intended to be squeezed in a person’s hand.

However, as with Leleupu dolls, it appears that counterfeiters have not been slow in taking advantage of this sudden rise in popularity and we have taken a number of reports from around the Shire from residents who were concerned that some of the Squishies they saw on sale may be counterfeits and that they may be unsafe for children to play with. This is entirely in line with similar concerns expressed in other parts of the country.

One of the main areas of concern relates to the strong chemical smell emitted by some of these Dumplings. It should also be noted that legitimate Squishy Dumplings are produced by a number of manufacturers.

The Consumers’ Association recently produced a fairly comprehensive article in their Which? magazine explaining what these Squishies are and what signs to look out for if you’re concerned about their authenticity. In a nutshell:

- There should be clear instructions included with the toy in case it leaks or is punctured,
- The toy should bear a CE or UKCA mark on the packaging which indicates that it has been safety assessed,
- The packaging should also bear the name and address of a UK importer or manufacturer,
- Be cautious if the toy gives off a strong chemical type smell as this may indicate the use of hazardous chemicals in the manufacturing process.

The article can be read in full by clicking on this link:

[Squishy dumpling toys: why you need to be wary about the latest toy trend - Which?](#)

Conclusion

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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.

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](#).

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