

# Trading Standards Scams Bulletin No. 144

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**

One concerned resident of Banff & Buchan recently reported to Trading Standards that he had seen a group of men working on a neighbour's roof and once the work appeared to be finished, the men then started going door-to-door to other peoples' houses nearby, apparently looking for more work. It was alleged that these men were telling occupants that they could see that their roof had sustained damage which the men could fix, although there was no obvious damage to any roof from what the resident could see. It also appeared that it was mainly older residents who were giving the men work, clearly believing that there was, in fact, damage.

Where they were getting no reply, these men were seen leaving leaflets through people's doors. Due to going out for a walk about this time, this resident saw the men going door-to-door but ended up getting a leaflet through the door instead, which he found when he got home again.

Due to his concerns, the resident did a check on Companies House for the company concerned but could find no exact match. The leaflet also had no company number on it, so he reported the matter to us.

A check by Trading Standards on the company's website shows a number of other issues, such as no registered company name, office or location; no company number (or VAT number); no postal address (or landline number), just a mobile number and e-mail address which, in effect, could be located anywhere and would not help much if a customer had a complaint they wanted resolved by going to the company's office.

## From mountain to sea

Most of these items above are required by law, as set out in the Companies (Trading Disclosures) Regulations 2008, although the company VAT number and landline are optional.

### Points to consider:

- Remember, when it comes to any cold caller, you simply don't know who they are or how honest and capable they are at doing the work under discussions,
- Please, to avoid a heated argument or a situation escalating, remain polite but firm in your discussions,
- The best response is "Thanks, but no thanks". If that isn't enough, tell the caller you have someone in mind for the work already. If that still isn't enough, tell the caller that the 'someone' is your son/nephew/cousin etc. who is in the trade, so you want to give them the work, to keep it in the family during this ongoing cost of living crisis,
- Don't get drawn into discussing money with the caller. If they speak about money, change the subject immediately to the weather, what's on TV or in the news currently. Their next step will be that they will try to pin you down on a price for the work, so avoid it before they can,
- If the caller claims that they can do the work 'cheaper than anyone else' this should be treated like a real red flag, as they may take your money and disappear, or worse, come back and do some work which will undoubtedly be a botch requiring a real tradesman to fix it and mean you will have to pay out twice, once for the botch and again for the fix,
- If you think you need work done, speak to friends, family or neighbours about who they can recommend. Remember to confirm that they did actually get work done and were happy with the result,
- Alternatively, you can search on the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader site](#) or the [Aberdeen Trusted Trader site](#) if you live near to Aberdeen or the [Moray Trusted trader site](#) if you live close to Morayshire,
- If the caller won't take no for an answer, step back inside and close and lock the front door. Tell them you have a previous visitor waiting inside for you, even if you don't, as this 'previous visitor' in the caller's eyes may be another witness to anything the caller says or does at the door,
- Please report any such incident to your local Trading Standards office.

### **Scams etc.**

One resident of the Buchan area recently reported to Trading Standards that he thought he had been the victim of an investment scam.



## From mountain to sea

Several months ago, the resident received a text message offering him the chance to join an investment portfolio with a low investment sum focussed on high growth opportunities. The text also alleged that Sir Keir Starmer, the former Prime Minister, had been involved in setting up the company concerned.

The resident considered the opportunity to be a genuine offer because of this so made an investment of £200 using his bank card details. This investment apparently also provided the resident with access to his own portfolio manager.

During the subsequent 6 months the resident received a number of phone calls from different members of the investment company who explained how the 'investment' worked. One call advised that when the investment reached £20k in value, the resident should sell the stocks and shares involved, transfer the gains to his bank account before then investing in gold and silver. Also, during this period, the resident, who could see the 'investment' growing in value online, was being asked for his bank account details to facilitate this investment strategy and these requests became more and more insistent.

It was also noted that during this period, the resident had received no documents from the investment company nor had he been asked to sign any forms, either electronically or physically. As a result of this, he then called Trading Standards to ask for advice.

In truth, this was a scam, specifically a type of scam called a boiler room scam, where people are cajoled or coerced into parting with money in an investment which does not actually exist. Any money 'invested' is usually lost for good.

Some points to consider:

- Sir Keir Starmer was a lawyer and politician, he is not involved in any investment schemes and any scheme which claims his involvement is likely to be a scam,
- Please be very wary of any investment scheme which uses any celebrity or celebrity's image to promote them. They are likely to be a scam,
- Never part with money for any investment which has come to you either from an unsolicited text, WhatsApp message, Facebook advert or e-mail. The likelihood is very high that it is a scam,
- The promise of high growth from a small investment in 6 months is pure pie in the sky. It should be seen as a real red flag as, for this level of reward, the risk strategy would have to be very, very high or be simply a scam. Either way, it is not for sensible people to get involved in,
- Remember; if something looks too good to be true, it probably is,

## From mountain to sea

- The various callers from the investment company would, in truth, have been no more than other employees in the call centre where the 'portfolio manager' worked,
- The online view of the growing portfolio would have been entirely fictitious, simply to give the scam credibility,
- Reputable investment companies are listed on the Financial Conduct Authority's website [here](#). If people do choose to invest, it should be as a result of a considered choice that they make using a reputable company, not in response to any form of cold call. This 'company' is not on that list,
- The likely aim of this scam was to lull the resident into a false sense of security that they were investing in something special, in effect a real life 'get rich quick scheme'. Of course, it was nothing of the sort and the resident's original £200 is long gone. The real aim was to get the resident to divulge their bank account details so they scammers could target that account for theft or some other financial crime,
- If you think you have been the victim of a scam and your bank account or bank or credit card was involved, please report the matter to your bank immediately. You can use the Stop Scams short code of 159 to do this, rather than going through the generic bank phone number and spending ages choosing from numerous pre-recorded options,
- Please also remember to report the matter to Police Scotland on 101 if you have lost money,
- Finally, please report the matter to your local Trading Standards office so that they can provide advice and warn others, so that those others don't also become victims.

### **Misc.**

As some readers may already know, there is a new Act which has recently come into effect with regards to tobacco and vape products. This is the aptly named Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 which will make some very substantial changes to the law. Further details are provided below via a recent news article:

### **Retailers in Scotland urged to prepare for next phase of Tobacco and Vapes Act**

***Joint statement from the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) and Action on Smoking and Health Scotland (ASH Scotland).***

Leading public health and Trading Standards organisations have joined forces to help retailers prepare for the next phase of the Tobacco and Vapes Act, as the

## From mountain to sea

[UK Government publishes new UK-wide guidance on changes coming into force from October 2026 and January 2027.](#)

In a [joint letter to the sector](#), the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) and Action on Smoking and Health Scotland (ASH Scotland) have set out the key changes businesses need to know, alongside practical guidance to support implementation. The organisations are calling on retailers to familiarise themselves with the new requirements now, ensuring they are ready to deliver on the next stage of the landmark legislation.

### **Key changes coming into force**

Guidance has now been published to support retailers ahead of the next implementation phase. The main changes include:

**From 1 October 2026:** The vape excise tax will come into effect. Retailers will have until April 2027 to sell through existing stock but be mindful that selling products, which entered the supply chain after the 1 October and do not have a tax stamp, will be an offence. More information is on the [HMRC website](#).

**From 29 October 2026:** The following additional restrictions seek to protect children from becoming addicted to nicotine:

- A minimum age of sale of 18 will apply to all consumer nicotine products, including nicotine pouches.
- Vending machines that are used in the distribution of consumer nicotine products will be prohibited.
- The free distribution of vapes and other consumer nicotine products will be prohibited.
- Scotland's Register of Tobacco and Vaping Product Retailers will be extended to include herbal smoking and nicotine products, and the Age Verification Policy requirement will also be extended to cover these products.

**From 1 January 2027:** The smokefree generation law comes into force. It will become illegal to sell tobacco to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. Existing customers who can legally buy tobacco before then will continue to be able to do so. In practice, this is simply an additional date-of-birth check within your existing age verification procedures.



## From mountain to sea

Responsible retailers have an important role in tackling the illicit market. If they become aware of businesses selling illicit tobacco or vapes, or selling tobacco or nicotine products illegally, we encourage them to report their concerns. To report illegal or underage sales in Scotland, please complete the [reporting form](#) on the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS) website.

CTSI and ASH Scotland have also highlighted that retailers, enforcement bodies and public health organisations all have a shared role in ensuring the success of the legislation. They concluded that reducing smoking rates will lead to healthier communities, increased consumer spending power and wider economic benefits – outcomes that ultimately support responsible retailers. Retailers are encouraged to review the full Government guidance, brief their staff and ensure they are ready ahead of the upcoming deadlines.

**John Herriman, Chief Executive of the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI), said:** "Responsible retailers play a vital role in protecting children and supporting fair trading. The overwhelming majority already have strong age verification procedures in place, and these new requirements build on those existing systems rather than creating a significant new burden. Trading Standards will continue to support businesses with clear advice and proportionate enforcement, while taking robust action against those who deliberately flout the law."

**Sheila Duffy, Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) Scotland, said:** "Retailers are on the front line in keeping harmful products out of the hands of children, and these changes will help to reduce the addiction and health damage that tobacco and consumer nicotine products cause, and enable people in all our communities to live longer, healthier lives."

### **Stop Press**

1. Aberdeenshire Trading Standards recently attended a shop in Stonehaven which we suspected was involved in the sale of illicit tobacco. As a result of our enquiries at the shop and a nearby car, which was entered, 6300 illicit cigarettes and 350 grammes of illicit hand rolling tobacco were seized and will be sent for destruction.
2. While compiling this document, a resident of south Aberdeenshire (me) received a phone call from the phone number 0121 296 7763 from an Indian sounding man calling himself Gavin. Gavin asked for the 'man of the house' (she wasn't in so I said I was) and claimed to work for Domestic & General (a legitimate insurance company). Gavin said he was calling about the



## From mountain to sea

appliance insurance which was coming to an end. Due to the call centre background noise and the fact that I do not have appliance insurance, Gavin was hung up on. A quick check on Who Called Me revealed that the number was a BT landline based in Birmingham, had been looked up 225 times before and had 9 user comments linking it to numerous phone scams.

Please:

- Be very wary if you get a call from this number (or any other unknown number),
- Perhaps let the number go to your answering service, then vet it,
- If in doubt don't call the number back as you may be exposing yourself to another chance of being scammed. Instead block the number if you can,
- Needless to say, I do not believe for one moment that Gavin worked for Domestic & General, nor that 'Gavin' was Gavin,
- Please report these calls to your local Trading Standards Office and, if a UK land line, to the Telephone Preference Service.

### **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.

## From mountain to sea

For urgent Trading Standards matters or doorstep crime matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council's Trading Standards at 01467 537222 or via [tradingstandards@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:tradingstandards@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](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 the [Friends Against Scams website](#) or [Take Five](#) at their website.

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 on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).

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