

Keep Your Money Safe



Surrey Police and Sussex Police Fraud Newsletter

In This Issue

Romance Fraud

Online Shopping

Virtual Events

"Each month we see many incidents of fraudsters targeting our residents in an attempt to defraud them.

"We're working hard to prevent this and support vulnerable victims of fraud or scams.

"By following our tips and encouraging family, friends and colleagues to do so too, you can reduce the risk of becoming a victim."

- Detective Chief Inspector Rob Walker, Surrey & Sussex Police Economic Crime Unit

Romance Fraud

Romance fraud is on the rise.

Thanks to the change in many people's circumstances and subsequent loneliness as a result of the pandemic, romance fraud increased by a third in 2020 compared to 2019.

Already this year Surrey Police and Sussex Police have seen 186 reports of romance fraud.

Case Study

A 47 year-old man met a woman on a dating site. They left the site and spoke on Google Hangouts every day, and over the course of several years the man became convinced that the woman was his girlfriend and that she lived in America.

One day she told him that she was struggling to pay her rent, and asked if he could help her. The man felt sorry for the woman, and felt obliged to help her. He believes he sent her over £1000 over time via PayPal.

It was only when he tried to make a payment to her for a plane ticket so she could visit him that his bank queried the transaction. They identified that he had been a victim of romance fraud, and he was asked into his local branch, where bank staff alerted police of the scam. The victim then received support and advice from police officers and his bank.

Date Smart Online

- ♥ Avoid giving away too many personal details when dating online. Revealing your full name, date of birth and home address may lead to your identity being stolen.
- ♥ Never send or receive money or give away your bank details to someone you've only met online, no matter how much you trust them or believe their story.
- ♥ Pick a reputable dating website and use the site's messaging service. Fraudsters want to quickly switch to social media or texting so there's no evidence of them asking you for money.

Vulnerable Fraud Caseworkers have pioneered a new online peer support group for victims of romance fraud referred to them by the police. It provides a safe and confidential space for victims to speak to other people who have had similar experiences as part of their recovery. Service users have reported feeling empowered and supported:

'It was beneficial to speak with people in the same situation – to help me realise I am not alone and completely stupid! Listening to the others in the support group makes you realise how cunning and clever the fraudsters are.'

Online Shopping: Pet Fraud

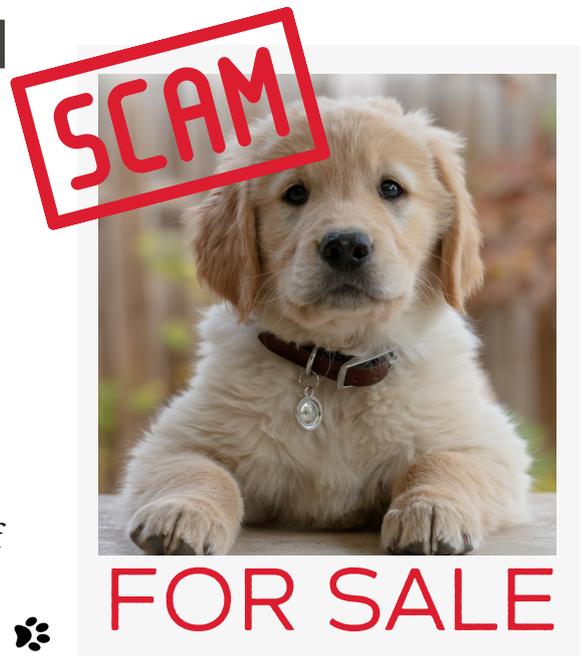
As the change in our lifestyles brought about by the pandemic has led to a rise in demand for pets, criminals are cashing in with pet fraud scams posting fake adverts on social media, online marketplaces and specific pet-selling platforms.

Unsuspecting victims are asked to pay a deposit for the animal, with lockdown restrictions used as an excuse to prevent a visit in person first. Fraudulent sellers often request multiple further payments to cover additional costs such as insurance, vaccinations and even delivery of the pet, but no pet is ever delivered.



If your circumstances allow to you give a dog a home, consider adopting a rescue dog from charities such as Battersea or the Dogs Trust. If you want to buy a puppy or specific breed of dog, please don't buy them from social media sites or anyone who cannot provide appropriate documentation.

Ask to see a puppy with their mother so you can see them in their home environment. If you're unable to physically view them in person, ask for a video call. Any responsible seller will understand why you want to see them. If a seller declines, challenge them on why.



If you have any suspicions, do not pay until you're certain it's genuine. Avoid paying by bank transfer: use payment methods that offer some level of buyer protection, such as credit cards.

The Kennel Club have a helpful list of questions you can ask breeders before visiting a puppy: <https://www.thekennelclub.org.uk/getting-a-dog-or-puppy/buying-a-dog/>

Case Study

A victim found a cavapoo puppy for sale online in the Brighton area. They decided they would like to buy it so paid a deposit for the puppy. The victim paid the deposit via bank transfer away from the site she found the advert on. The victim arranged a visit with the seller to meet the puppy but was given a fake address. The victim tried to contact the seller but unfortunately had no response and was left with a loss of £450.

Virtual Events

The West Sussex Community Safety & Wellbeing Team and Trading Standards are running free monthly scams awareness webinars that you can attend from the comfort of your own home.

Learn what the different types of scams are, how to spot them, and what to do if you or your family become a victim of fraud.



Book via:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/staying-safe-online-amp-traded-standards-wscc-33051273661>



Have you been a victim of fraud?

If you or someone you know is vulnerable and has been a victim of fraud call:

Surrey Police on 101 or visit www.surrey.police.uk
Sussex Police on 101 or visit www.sussex.police.uk

Report fraud or attempted fraud, by contacting Action Fraud at http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/report_fraud or call 0300 123 2040.