Keep Your Money Safe

Surrey Police and Sussex Police Fraud Newsletter

In This Issue

Holiday Fraud

Pet Fraud

Text Scams

Staying Safe Online - Scam Awareness Webinars

"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

Holiday Fraud

Surrey Police and Sussex Police have seen several reports of people falling victim to caravan and lodge holiday scams on Facebook.

Due to international travel restrictions, the popularity of 'staycations' is on the rise. Many victims have seen caravan holidays advertised on Facebook for different areas of the UK and been asked to pay a deposit amount to reserve dates to stay.

Fraudsters may steal images of hotels or rented apartments from other travel websites and pass them off as their own. They may also promise bookings and take payment on accommodation, transport and excursions, but the bookings are never made.

Victims are often told to pay in cash or via a bank transfer, such as MoneyWise or Western Union, which can be difficult to trace and isn't refundable. Unfortunately some victims pay hundreds of pounds to fraudsters, believing they have booked a short stay away. Once the advert details disappear, along with all contact, the victim realises that they have been scammed.

Case Study

A female victim from Sussex saw an advert on Facebook for a lodge available in Camber Sands. She got in touch with the advertiser asking to book the lodge for a week in July, and was asked to pay £1000 via bank transfer.

When the victim tried to contact the advertiser to let them know the time what time they would be checking in at the lodge, she found the advert and profile had both been removed. At this point she realised that the holiday booking did not exist.

Spot the Signs

- You're contacted out of the blue by a travel agent or company you've never spoken to before, offering a holiday at a very low price.
- The details, pictures or address of the property or hotel on offer look suspicious, or independent website reviews aren't favourable or don't exist.
- You're asked to pay using bank transfer or cash.

How to protect yourself

- Book a holiday directly with an airline or hotel, or through a reputable agent.
- Don't reply to unsolicited emails, texts, social media or calls with holiday offers.
- If you decide to deal directly with the property owner or a letting agent, ask them questions about the booking, room, location and area
- Pay by credit or debit card if you can for extra protection.

Pet Fraud

Action Fraud data shows that £2,638,323 was lost by prospective pet owners in the 2020/21 financial year. This is an increase of over 20% compared to the previous financial year, and came about after would-be owners put down deposits for pets they saw advertised online.

Case Study

A woman from West Sussex found a puppy she wanted to purchase from a rescue centre on Facebook, which claimed to bring puppies to the UK from Bosnia. The victim was asked to pay a deposit to reserve the puppy and to send over a copy of her ID. She sent £100 and a copy of her passport and a utility bill.

The victim and other adoptees were placed in a joint WhatsApp group. They were told that they were having issues getting the dogs to the UK and financially struggling to look after the puppies. These updates made the victim suspicious and she decided to pull out of the adoption. After speaking to other 'adoptees', it became clear to the victim she had been scammed and the puppies were not real.

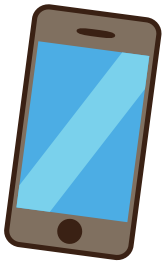
Protect yourself from pet fraud

Do your research. Look up reviews of the website or person you are buying from.

Trust your instincts. Unable to view the animal in person? Ask for a video call. Buying a young animal? Ask to see the mother and the rest of the litter. If the seller declines, challenge them. If you have any suspicions, don't pay until you're sure it's genuine. Any responsible seller will be happy to show you the animals and answer your questions.

Choose your payment method wisely. Avoid paying by bank transfer. Credit card or payment service such as PayPal are better.

Text Scams



Have you received a suspicious text message recently?

Out of the blue messages, maybe telling you that you have a parcel that couldn't be delivered, are likely to be fraudulent. Never click on links or provide personal or banking details if you receive a text like this. If you are unsure whether a text message is genuine, call the supposed organisation on a genuine contact number and ask them.

If you receive a text message you were not expecting that you think is suspicious, please report it by forwarding onto 7726, then delete the text message.

Staying Safe Against Scams In West Sussex

The West Sussex Community Safety & Wellbeing Team and Trading Standards are running free monthly scams awareness webinars to help raise awareness of these different types of scams, how to spot them, and what to do if you or your family become a victim:

Tuesday 14 September 2021: 10:00 – 11:30am
Tuesday 12 October 2021: 10:00 – 11:30am - Book here
Thursday 4 November 2021: 10:00 – 11:30am - Book here

Click below to book any of the above sessions via Eventbrite:

Staying Safe Online & Trading Standards - WSCC Events | Eventbrite

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.