

Trading Standards News

A summary of work and Facebook posts by the Trading Standards Service



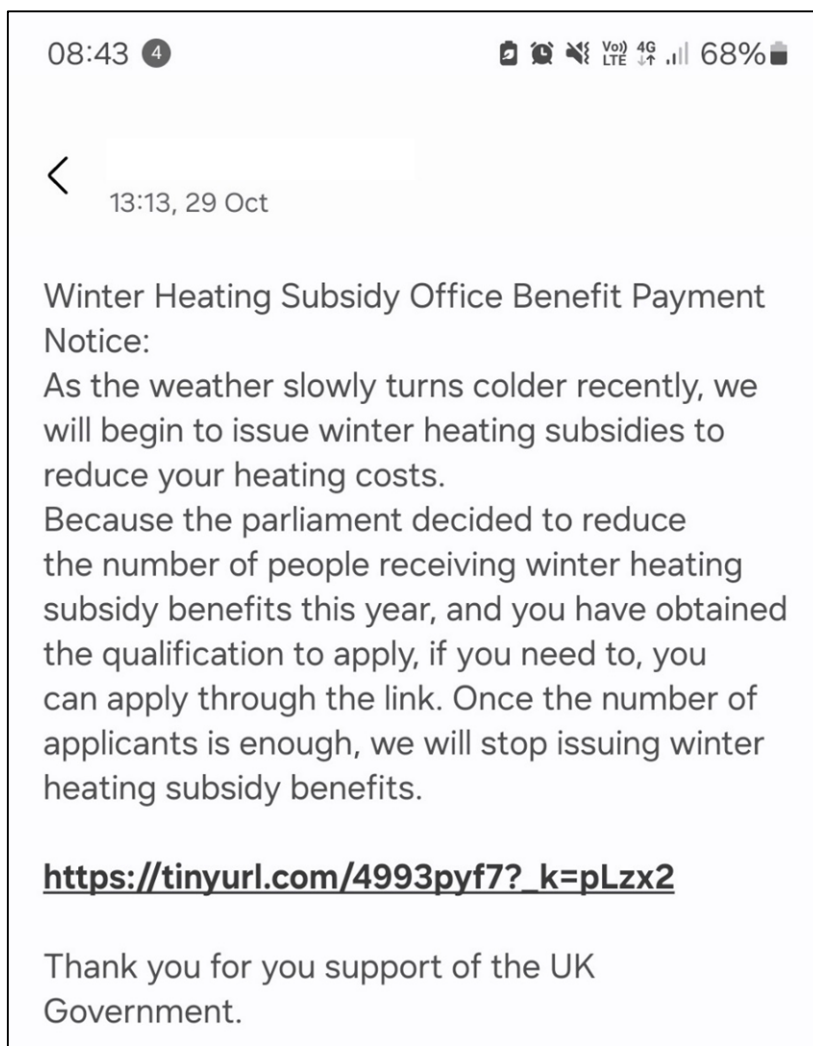
Welcome to our Autumn 2024 Newsletter

The latest news of our work and advice on scams and consumer issues.

Remember to stay up to date with our latest news by [following us on Facebook](#).

Contact Citizen's Advice Consumer helpline on 0808 223 1133 or [Citizen's Advice online](#) for advice on all Trading Standards matters.

Scam Alert – Fake winter fuel subsidy texts



A new scam text offering to replace the Winter Fuel Allowance is circulating. It claims to be a "Benefit Payment Notice", and the scammers have attached a link for you to 'apply'.

The link directs recipients to a fake government website, designed to appear legitimate but it is a ploy to gather personal information. **The text message is fake!**

The government do not send out text messages asking people to click on links to make a claim. Those eligible for the Winter Fuel Allowance will be paid automatically, or through being accepted for a new applicable benefit claim.

Some residents on certain benefits will receive a £150 discount off their energy bill under a separate [Warm Home Discount Scheme](#). If you're eligible, you'll usually get the discount automatically and your electricity supplier will apply it to your bill. The money is not paid to you. **Letters are sent out to those who will receive the discount in October and November, recipients are not notified by text.**

If you receive a suspicious text message, report it by forwarding for free to 7726, then block the number. This will report the message to your mobile phone provider. Speak to your bank if you are worried you have given money to a fraudster. Find out more about [scam texts and how to avoid them](#).

Shop shut down after more than 1,000 illegal vapes confiscated



A shop has been [closed down](#) after it was found selling "harmful" illegal tobacco and vapes. Roman Express in Loughborough will be shut for a month after thousands of vapes and hundreds of packets of tobacco were confiscated by our Trading Standards Team.

A number of vapes were being sold with labels stating, "no nicotine", but were found to contain nicotine. Roman Express also sold an illegal vape to a young person without challenging them during a test purchase in August this year.

You can report concerns about sale of illegal vapes and fake tobacco to Trading Standards [via our website](#). You can report anonymously if you wish.

Protect yourself from lowballers!

What is a lowballer? A lowballer is someone who offers significantly below the seller's asking price.

Selling your belongings shouldn't be a stressful ordeal. Unfortunately, some buyers will negotiate aggressively and seek to deceive you, the seller into believing the goods are worth well under the asking price due to a fault that doesn't exist.



Leicestershire Trading Standards recently received a report about a buyer taking advantage of vulnerable sellers by falsely claiming there were faults with the seller's Caravan, pressuring them into accepting over £20,000 less than the asking price.

There are some steps that you can take to protect yourself from lowball offers:

- Know your item's condition - check it or get it checked to make sure there aren't any issues that you are not aware of.
- Ask a family member or friend to be with you when a prospective purchaser views the item.
- Know your item's value - get multiple valuations to establish a fair price before you set it.
- Trust your instincts: If something feels off, it probably is. Don't be afraid to say no or walk away from a deal.

Get advice from [Which?](#) on how to [sell your own goods with confidence](#).

Product Safety Alert – Water beads!

The [Office of Product Safety and Standards](#) have recently taken steps to remove from the market, water beads marketed as toys.

Water beads are unsafe for use in play by small children, because if the beads are swallowed, they swell up and can pose a serious risk of gastrointestinal blockage. This could require surgery or cause asphyxiation (suffocation or choking). Whilst water beads are frequently used to keep plants and floral decorations hydrated, we advise against this if there's a chance they may be accessed by children or vulnerable adults.

Keep water beads away from young children



Children love water beads. But it's really dangerous if a young child swallows them.



They expand in the belly and can block the bowel. Some grow as big as golf balls.

A child may need major surgery to remove them. So please keep them away from young children.



If you suspect a child has swallowed a water bead, get medical help straight away.

Read advice from the [Child Accident Prevention Trust](#).

Scam Alert – Fake parking fine texts and airport parking service warning

Scammers are sending texts with [fake parking fine claims](#) and follow up messages claiming to be the “final warning”. Text message content varies, but an initial text message warns that if you don’t pay an overdue “parking penalty charge notice” you may have to pay more or go to court.

There are often grammatical errors, such as commas, spaces and capital letters in the wrong places. They also include a shortened link which is not an official government web domain. An official UK government site always has “gov.uk” at the end.

Car park fine texts are always fake. Real Parking Penalty Charge Notices must be sent to you by letter through the post. The letter will be addressed to you personally and will include your vehicle registration number, details about where and when the parking contravention happened, and will often include photos of where your car was parked.

More information on this scam can be found here: [Driver and Vehicle Safety Agency](#).

Check before you “Park and Fly”

We recently received a report from a consumer who paid for a park and ride service to and from an airport. However, they were directed to park on a country road rather than a secure car park and a promised shuttle bus did not turn up to take them to meet their flight. The company is now being uncooperative, and the consumer is struggling to get their money back.

As with any service you are purchasing, research the company and read online reviews before you sign up. Make sure a full UK address and contact details are available in case of any problems.

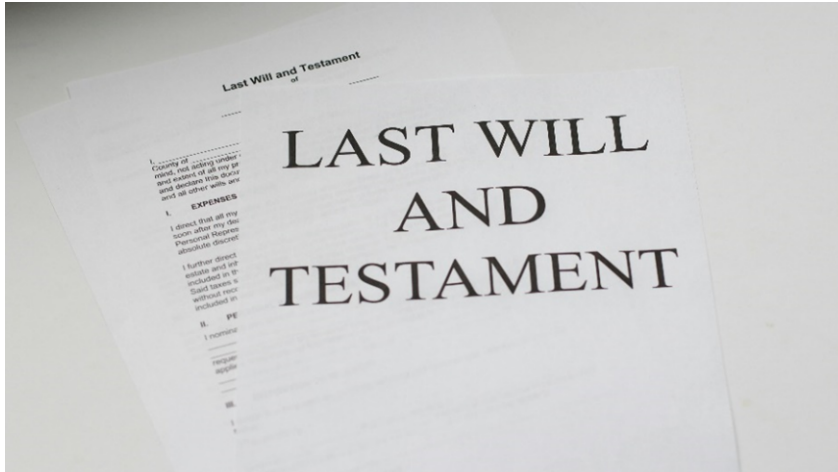
The [Park Mark](#) scheme advises on checks you can make before booking a parking service and lists car parks which are managed under their code of practice.

Parking Penalty Charge Notice :
Please Pay a parking penalty charge notice (PCN) issued by a local council. If you do not pay a PCN within 28 days, you’ll get a ‘charge certificate’ and you’ll have 14 days to pay the original fine plus 50% more.
If you do not pay you’ll be prosecuted - you may have to pay a bigger fine as well as court costs.
Please pay your fine at the link after reading the information.

<https://qrco.de/bfNjWq?JT=WsF7xOrEbGO>

Thank you again for your cooperation.

Thinking of making your will?



In the UK, anyone can write a will. This means that you can [write it yourself](#) or choose a will writing business to write it on your behalf.

If you choose to purchase a will writing service, it is important that you understand what you are buying, and your rights if things go wrong.

The [Competition and Markets Authority \(CMA\)](#) has produced a new guide to help you when buying will writing services.

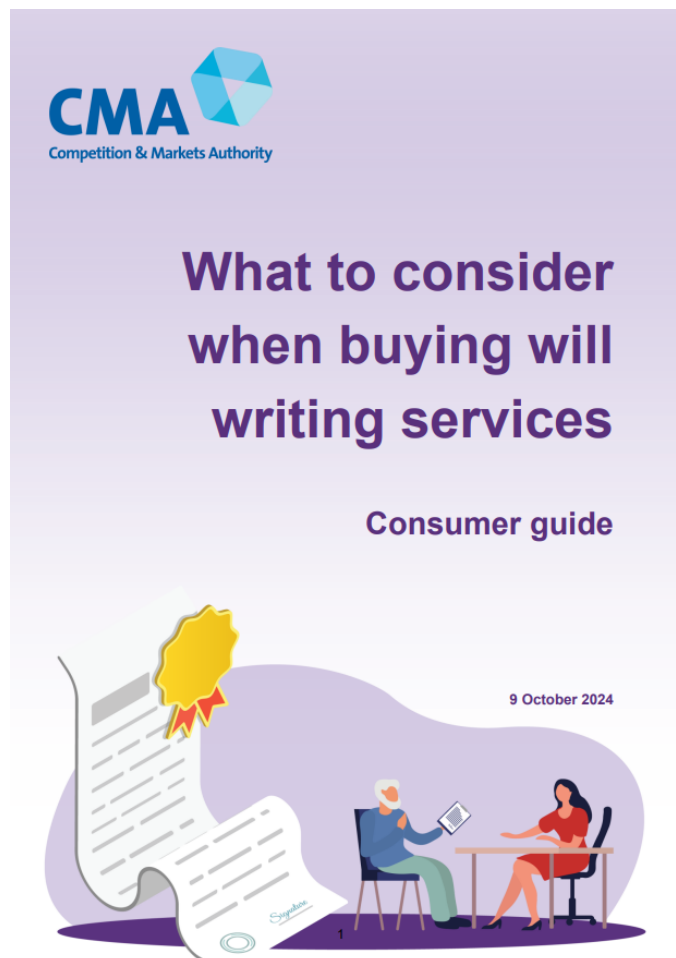
They advise asking for information such as the will writer's qualifications and training they have completed. Do they have a complaints procedure if something goes wrong? Is professional indemnity insurance in place? Also check whether the will writer is:

- drafting the will for you
- using someone else or another business to draft the will
- providing a template that you need to fill out (perhaps via an online form)

If it's not clear from the website or the information provided, ask the business these questions and get any clarification in writing.

Shop around and compare will writers so you can see what each one offers. If you are able, try and get quotes from at least 3 different businesses.

Get all the advice you need [before you part with your money](#).



Petfishing – who is the person behind the pet?



You've probably heard of 'Catfishing', where a stranger creates a fictional online persona to lure someone into a relationship.

Deceitful pet sellers use a similar tactic to 'Petfish' unsuspecting

buyers. These unscrupulous sellers pretend that the puppy or kitten they're selling you comes from a happy home.

In reality, the animal may have been bred or kept in poor conditions. If you're looking for a new cat or dog, you're more likely to come across deceitful sellers than you might think. These sellers mistreat animals to line their pockets.

Some pets once purchased are found to have severe health problems. Often, they won't have been socialised with other animals or people. It's important to do your research so you know your new pet has come from a responsible seller. Follow this step by step guide to [Buying a cat or dog](#).

Follow us...

Have you visited [our Facebook page](#) recently?

We regularly post on all manner of consumer issues from new scam alerts and product safety notices to the work of our Animal Health Officers and East Midlands Airport team.

Join over 2000 followers to stay up to date.



Leicestershire Trading Standards Service

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