

Trading Standards Scams News

A round-up of the latest scams alerts



Leicestershire
County Council

Welcome to our Winter Scams Newsletter

Welcome to the latest edition of the Leicestershire Trading Standards Service scams newsletter. Here you will find details of the latest scams and information about how to protect yourself and report a scam.

Scams to watch out for in 2026

Scam Watch 2026: What to look out for so far this year

Fraudsters are always looking for new ways to trick people, and 2026 is likely to bring a fresh wave of clever and convincing scams. Although the technology may change, the goal stays the same: to pressure people into handing over money or personal information.

Here are some of the scams we expect to see this year — and simple steps you can take to stay safe.



AI-Driven Impersonation Scams

Criminals are now using artificial intelligence (AI) to make their messages and phone calls sound incredibly realistic. Some people may even receive fake phone calls or messages that sound like a family member or a company they trust such as their bank.

These scams rely on urgency and emotional manipulation and are becoming harder to identify.

✔ Stay safe:

- Don't rely on the caller's voice alone — scammers can copy voices with technology.
 - Verify identity before acting if someone asks for money unexpectedly, always check with them using a known number to confirm the request.
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▲ Fake "Official" Messages

With households feeling financial pressure, scammers are exploiting people with fake government grants and cost of living payment schemes. Criminals may pretend to be from your bank, the Government or other trusted organisations.

🔍 You might see:

- Fraudsters purporting to be from DWP, HMRC, local councils, banks, or social media platforms offering "support."
- Offers for free energy rebates, council tax refunds, or fuel vouchers, these are classic red flags to look out for.
- Scammers pretending to help you claim refunds or cost of living payments.

✔ Stay safe:

- Genuine organisations **never** ask for passwords or one-time passcodes.
 - Never respond to unsolicited calls or text messages asking for personal, financial, or bank details, especially if referencing government support.
 - If in doubt, contact the organisation using the details on their official website, or any genuine paperwork you may have.
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🛒 Online Shopping and Delivery Scams

Online marketplaces and delivery services continue to be targeted by scammers.

🔍 You might see:

- Fake online shops or websites.
- Fake product reviews.
- Messages claiming there's a problem with a parcel.

✔ Stay safe:

- You can use <https://www.getsafeonline.org/checkawebsite/> to check if a website is genuine.
- Look for repetitive or generic language, check the reviewer's profile, compare reviews across platforms.
- If something seems unbelievably good, it probably isn't real.
- Only pay through secure, protected payment methods such as credit cards or reputable third-party payment services.
- Avoid clicking on links in unexpected delivery messages.

Smart Device and QR Code Tricks

As more people use QR codes and smart devices at home, fraudsters may try to take advantage.

 Watch out for:

- QR codes stuck over genuine ones.
- Fake apps pretending to be for smart devices.
- Being asked to download remote access software.

 Stay safe:

- Only scan QR codes from trusted sources.
- Download apps from official app stores such as Google play and Apple Store.



Instant-Payment Scams

As banks roll out more features with systems like bank transfers and mobile apps, criminals are exploiting the fact that such services are fast and often irreversible. They push victims to send money urgently, pretending to be relatives, employers, or service providers.

 Watch out for:

- Unexpected payment requests.
- Requests to pay via unusual methods (gift cards, cryptocurrency).
- Poor grammar or suspicious email addresses.

 Stay safe:

- Beware of urgency, scammers will create pressure by saying things like “act now” or “your account will be closed.” Take a moment to think before sending money.
- Use secure payment methods such as credit or debit card, avoid bank transfers.
- Enable mobile banking alert notifications by logging into your banking app, navigate to Settings, select Notifications (or "Manage alerts"). Ensure your phone's system settings allow push notifications for the app.

! Pressure and Panic Are Still the Biggest Red Flags

No matter how advanced scams become, criminals still rely on emotional pressure, urgency, fear or excitement.

✓ Stay safe:

- Take a moment to **pause and think**.
 - If something feels off, it probably is.
 - Talk to a friend, family member or trusted person before acting.
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📞 Need Advice?

If you're unsure whether something is a scam, trust your instincts and ask for help. Local support services, Trading Standards, Citizens Advice and your bank are all there to help keep you safe.

🛡️ How to Protect Yourself in 2026

- Don't trust unexpected messages or calls, even if the voice sounds familiar.
 - **Verify requests** using official contact details—not links sent in texts.
 - Be sceptical of "urgent" instructions, especially involving payments.
 - **Use scam-checking tools**, see 'useful tools and resources' section of this newsletter
 - **Report scams** to Report Fraud (details below) or your bank's fraud team immediately.
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New Report Fraud Website


New national reporting centre for cyber crime and fraud launched

Report Fraud has replaced its predecessor Action Fraud as the national platform for victims of fraud and cyber crime to report incidents.

Anyone searching for how to report cyber crime or fraud, or trying to use Action Fraud, will be redirected to the new service, which can be reached directly online at [UK's Home for Reporting Cyber Crime & Fraud - Report Fraud](#) or by calling 0300 123 2040.

Report Fraud will provide:

 A clear and simple reporting process to tell the police about cyber crime and fraud.

 Guidance on what to report and how that information is used.

 Further support & information for victims.




reportfraud.police.uk

Find out more about the Report Fraud service here :

<https://www.reportfraud.police.uk/>

Romance Fraud

 **Romance fraud is when a criminal uses a fake profile to form a relationship with you.**

They try to gain your trust by appealing to your compassionate side, finding out personal information about you and creating fake stories so it seems like you have a lot in common. Criminals sometimes target profiles that identify themselves as widowed or divorced to play on vulnerability.

Once they have gained your trust, they start inventing reasons for needing money. These can be anything from an emergency situation, funds for travel to come and see you, asking you to take out a loan for them in your name, and many more.

There will often be a promise of paying you back.

 **We're encouraging people to:**

- Avoid sending money to someone you've never met or have only met a few times, especially if they're declaring strong feelings for you after only a few conversations.
- If someone asks you to lie to your bank, this is a scam - don't engage with them, report them immediately.
- Be alert to inconsistencies in their stories.



- Research the person you're speaking to. You can upload the photos from their profile into a search engine to see if it appears anywhere else with a different name.
- Stay on the dating site or platform until you're confident the person is who they say they are before you share your phone number.
- If you think you might have been targeted in a romance scam, it's ok to reach out to someone – you're not alone. Contact your bank, they are there to help.

What is love bombing? 💔

This is a manipulative tactic that criminals can use when you first match with them. They bombard you with loving messages and constant attention in the hope you start to trust them. Here are the red flags to look out for:

- ▶ They overwhelm you with excessive attention and constant communication.
- ▶ They make grand promises early on, like taking you on holiday.
- ▶ Intense flattery, praise and compliments.

They then invent reasons for needing money, like travel to see you or emergencies. Always consider the possibility of a romance scam and #TakeFive to speak to someone you trust to get a second opinion.

Friends Against Scams Campaign News

Friends Against Scams is a national initiative from the National Trading Standards Scams Team, created to help protect our communities from fraud. By raising awareness and giving people the confidence to recognise and report scams, the project empowers all of us to take a stand.

Whether it's learning the signs of a scam, supporting others, or simply spreading the word, every Friend Against Scams plays a part in making our communities safer. You can learn more and sign up here 🖱️ <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/become-a-friend>

Young Friends Against Scams

📢 Teachers, schools and youth group leaders!

Want to help young people spot scams and stay safe?



Young Friends Against Scams have released refreshed resources for schools and youth groups, including:

- 📊 Training PowerPoints.
- 🎯 Interactive games & activities.
- 🏠 20-minute assembly presentations.
- 📖 30- & 60-minute lesson plans.

👉 Sign up as a SCAMChampion to access these resources and more:

www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/scamchampions

No Blame No Shame

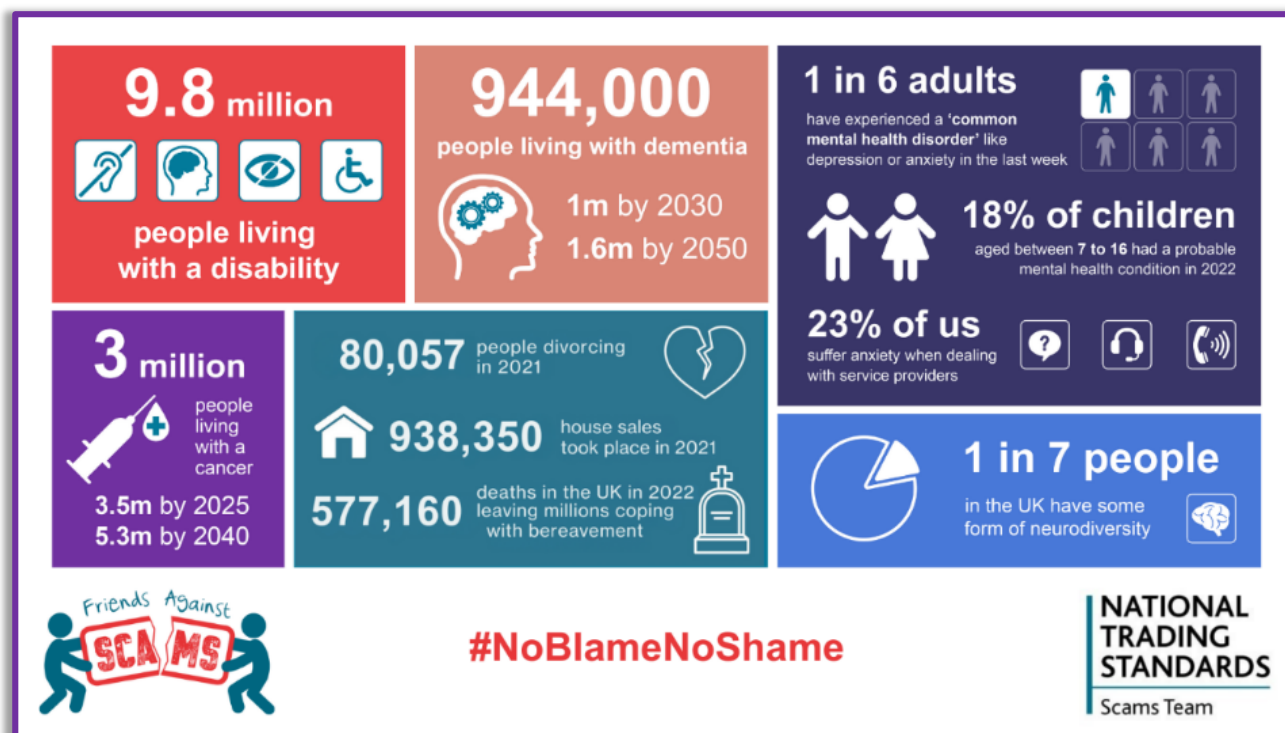
The “No Blame, No Shame” campaign aims to challenge the stigma around being scammed by placing the blame firmly on the criminals. It encourages people to come forward and report what’s happened, reminding everyone that scam victims aren’t foolish, they have been deliberately manipulated.

▲ Vulnerability may arise from various factors including:

- ✓ Long-term health issues e.g. disability, addiction, cognitive or mental health conditions.
- ✓ Major life events such as bereavement, job loss, or divorce.
- ✓ Low resilience causing difficulty coping with financial or emotional shocks.
- ✓ Capability challenges like poor literacy or digital skills, low confidence, and language barriers.
- ✓ Circumstantial factors including low income, debt, caring responsibilities.
- ✓ Age-related challenges like ill health, unfamiliarity with technology or a lack of life experience.

🚨 Vulnerability increases the risk of scams and fraud 🚨

To learn more visit www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/coercive-control



Finally....

⚙️ Useful tools and resources:

- Check if something might be a scam here

👉 www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/scams/check-if-something-might-be-a-scam

- Check if a website is genuine here 👉 www.getsafeonline.org/checkawebsite
- Check if a telephone number might be a scam here 👉 www.who-called.co.uk

If you would like to report a scam, or you have been a victim of fraud, you can get in touch with the following organisations:

- Report Fraud – www.reportfraud.police.uk or call on 0300 123 2040 to report fraud and cyber crime
- Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline - 0808 223 1133 for further advice and next steps.
- If you think fraudsters may have obtained your money, contact your bank immediately using the contact details on the back of your card or bank statement.

- To keep up to date with the latest scams advice & information, you can join over 2700 followers on the Leicestershire Trading Standards Service Facebook page here www.facebook.com/leicstradingstandards



Leicestershire Trading Standards Service

Email: tradingstandards@leics.gov.uk Facebook/LeicsTradingStandards



Find out how to stay ahead of
scams at gov.uk/stopthinkfraud >>



UK Government