



From mountain to sea

# Doorstep Callers and Scams

## Bulletin No. 112

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 resident in the Garioch area recently notified Trading Standards about a 'tradesman' from Aberdeen she had employed to do some work for her. Apparently, they are joiners.

Unfortunately, our resident found the joiner on one of the traders web sites and hired him on the basis of his reviews. He was then hired to do some work in the resident's kitchen.

Almost from the start it became apparent that this trader and his assistant preferred to do a rushed job rather than a good job as they fitted kitchen doors the wrong way round, fitted doors which were the wrong colour, drilled additional holes in units when they couldn't match doors up with carcasses and siliconed in a sink which should have been on brackets, despite the resident asking that the brackets be used. All this time the pair were extremely messy, leaving pieces of wood, boxes from the kitchen units and lunch wrappers lying about in their wake. In frustration, the resident had to pick these items up behind them.

In addition, the joiner was overbearing, would not listen to the resident's concerns and turned up without warning on days when the resident was not expecting them. (There is much else to this saga which cannot be disclosed without risking identifying the resident.) In the end, the resident paid the bill of several thousand pounds for the work, mainly to get rid of the joiner and his assistant but has been left with kitchen doors which don't fit, don't open properly or don't close properly. She has since had to get other traders in to rectify this mess.

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Subsequent checks on the relevant trader's web page on the traders' web site shows this joiner as having only 4 and 5 star reviews. This, in view of the resident's experiences, clearly casts doubts on the authenticity of these reviews.

As can be seen, this situation started to go wrong when the resident chose this 'tradesman'. This was due to her not knowing where to turn to get a genuine tradesman rather than a rogue trader.

As with other types of scammers who search social media looking for victims, rogue traders search the traders' web sites looking for victims (this trader admitted that he was signed up to only one site but searched the others without joining, so that it didn't cost him money). Clearly this sort of behaviour increases the risk for home owners looking for genuine tradesmen.

As we have covered before, if you are looking for a tradesman:

- speak to friends, family and neighbours and ask them if they have work done similar to what you want done,
- ensure that work was actually done and not that the recommender simply knows about that trader,
- PLEASE don't ever go onto social media to ask for recommendations as it's simply too risky and you don't know who you're really dealing with,
- if you live close to Aberdeen, consider the Aberdeen [Care & Repair website](#),
- if you live further afield in Aberdeenshire, please consider the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader website](#)
- the Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader scheme is different from other platforms as members are rigorously vetted by Trading Standards and must comply with consumer legislation,
- numbers are growing for the range of trades listed and the numbers of traders for each trade,
- each trader, before they are listed, must agree to abide by a Code of Practice to treat customers fairly, even when a dispute arises,
- produce proof of Public Liability Insurance,
- checks are made to ensure that submitted reviews during the application process are authentic,
- background checks are made with Companies House, the HSE and Advertising Standards Authority, amongst others,

Schemes like these are most successful when consumers use them as their first port of call when looking for a trader and when traders sign up to the scheme to obtain more work. One may encourage the other.



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Please consider making the [Aberdeenshire Trusted Trader website](#) your first and only port of call and consider encouraging any good tradesmen you know to sign up for the scheme to squeeze cowboys out of the market.

### **Scams etc.**

#### **Telephone Scam**

One resident of the east Marr area advised recently that they had received a phone call from a male caller about green energy. This caller, who had a nondescript English accent, claimed that the resident had actually called him about this matter and that he was simply returning her call. In truth, the resident had not called anyone, but this was the ruse by the caller to try to hook the resident into what would obviously become a scam.

On the one hand the resident initially heard other voices in the background of the call whereas the protracted pauses in the caller answering her questions made her believe that she may be speaking to an AI program. When the resident asked directly if she was speaking to an AI program, the caller hung up.

Whether human or an AI, the tactic in use was to get the resident involved in a conversation, thereby reducing the likelihood that she would say no, before pitching the real spiel to the resident, an offer which would be too good to be true. Thankfully, she was having none of it and said no anyway.

The number which the call came from was a 0191 number which is the area code for the Sunderland area of the north of England. A search on free reverse phone lookup service the Who Called Me website showed that this number is actually a BT landline in Sunderland which has been looked up almost 1000 times and has 12 reports against it for being associated with energy scams.

Should you receive a call with the caller, human or AI, claiming that they were calling you back about your enquiry into green energy, as with this resident, simply hang up, as it will likely be a scam similar to this one.

Please also remember to report these sorts of matters to your local Trading Standards office. Contact details are at the end of this bulletin.

### **Misc.**

#### **Use of celebs in scam ads on the rise**

By JTS Staff

Bogus online ads using fake celebrity endorsements are a growing trend, the ASA has warned.

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Adverts for cryptocurrency, investment and slimming scams featuring public figures including Keir Starmer, Dua Lipa and King Charles were among those referred to the Scam Ad Alert System in 2024, the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) has revealed.

The ASA runs the Scam Ad Alert System to ‘complement and enhance the work already being done by digital advertising and social media platforms and other regulatory and law enforcement bodies to tackle scam ads and, more broadly, other fraudulent activity online,’ the regulator says.

The new figures indicate the most common and rapidly spreading types of scam, as well as different companies’ response rates to reports of scam adverts. In 2024, the ASA received 1,691 reports of potential scams through its [quick reporting form](#). Of those, 177 were referred to online platforms for removal and to ‘further act on intelligence’.

The vast majority of Scam Ad Alerts centred around celebrities and other public figures, with a growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) to create deepfakes – videos, images or audio clips that have been digitally manipulated to create a convincing but fake piece of media. Among these was a deepfake video ad featuring King Charles recommending cryptocurrency investment.

The ASA advises consumers who see ads featuring celebrity endorsements to do some checks before handing over their details, especially if the offer seems too good to be true or uses pressure tactics. “Check if they are posting from their official account and consider if the ad seems out of character. While some celebrities do endorse products, they don’t usually promote complex investments or wonder cures. As ever, if it seems too good to be true it probably is,” the ASA cautioned.

Travel scam ads – particularly for free or heavily discounted local travel – were part of an emerging trend in 2024. These ads included promotions for ‘unlimited travel’ for a one-off fee. Travel companies impersonated included Transport for Greater Manchester, Great Western Railway and ScotRail. Landing pages asked users to hand over personal details to obtain the offer.

Ads for heavily discounted big brands were another frequent scam, with products such as iPhones being offered at rock-bottom prices, and references to trusted supermarkets and other retailers being used to lend the bogus ads credibility. Many of them claimed that the retailer was being forced to sell the products cheaply to get rid of stock, implying that only selected or lucky



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customers would get the deal. Landing pages asked for personal and financial details so the product could be sent out – needless to say, the goods never arrive.

### **Response rates**

The response rates of the tech companies that the ASA contacted about scam ads are also included in the figures, revealing which of them are the most – and least – pro-active in removing offending ads from their platforms.

The ASA says it expects participating platforms to respond to Scam Ad Alerts within 48 hours to confirm they have removed the reported ad. The regulator's target for 2024 was a response rate within 48 hours of at least 80%.

Microsoft came top of the class, with a 100% response rate within 48 hours. It was followed by Facebook owner Meta, with a 91% response rate within 48 hours, and 9% of cases being dealt with subsequently.

Outbrain, which hosts online ads on third-party websites, managed an 88% response rate within 48 hours, and responded to 12% of ads after that.

Google responded to 68% of Scam Ad Alerts within 48 hours, and 27% subsequently. In 5% of cases, it failed to respond at all.

Bottom of the list was X Corp, the Elon Musk-owned social media company. It managed to respond to just 23% of scam ads within 48 hours, and 5% after that. In 72% of cases, it failed to respond at all. The ASA noted, however, that once problems with contact arrangements had been resolved, X managed a response rate of 80% within 48 hours in the final three months of the year.

The ASA said: "We are encouraged that the majority of platforms responded to 80% or more of Alerts within 48 hours. We successfully engaged with the other platforms to increase their response rates. That included working closely with Google to trial their Priority Flagging Program which led to significant improvement, with a response rate of 94% within 48 hours (and 100% response overall) in the final three months of the year."

The ASA is encouraging consumers to [report any suspected scams](#) seen in paid-for ad space online, including paid-for search ads; ads on news websites and other online publications; and paid-for ads on social media platforms, games or apps.

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“Reporting a scam to us or other bodies helps prevent other people from falling victim to scams and may help stop criminal activity,” the ASA said. “We share all Scam Ad Alerts with the government’s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC). They operate the government’s takedown service, which seeks to remove malicious email addresses and websites.”

### **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 the [Consumer Advice Scotland](#) website or call them on 0808 164 6000. For urgent Trading Standards matters, contact Aberdeenshire Council’s Trading Standards at 01467 537222.

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.



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All previous Trading Standards bulletins can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website on the [Trading Standards Scams Bulletin page](#).