

From mountain to sea

Doorstep Callers and Scams

Bulletin No. 93

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

Nothing to Report.

Scams etc.

Council Survey Scam

One resident in the Formartine area recently reported to Trading Standards that he had been called on his mobile by a female caller who claimed to be undertaking a survey on behalf of 'the Council'. This caller was calling from a number which started with 0331 (not to be confused with the 0133 area code, which relates to Deeside). Somehow, the caller knew that the resident was a Council tenant and that he had had his windows replaced recently. The survey was apparently in connection with this work, to see how satisfied the resident was with the outcome and the workmen's professionalism and consisted of a few simple questions. The final question was about how old the resident was. The caller then ended the call.

A short time later another female called the resident from the same phone number and advised the resident that she had been advised by her colleague that he had 'housing problems'. The resident advised this caller that he had no housing problems and then asked where this caller had obtained his details. When no answer was forthcoming, he promptly hung up.

It was at this point that the resident became suspicious and checked the callers' phone number on the reverse call look-up service [Who Called Me](#) where he learned that this number had been looked up more than 2300 times and had

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generated 45 reports that the number was associated with housing repairs scams. He then reported the matter to Trading Standards, who are investigating. Some points to note:

- Aberdeenshire Council are not and have not been conducting any such survey, directly or via sub-contractors,
- Thankfully, this resident was wary enough not to offer any personal or financial information to either caller,
- Phone numbers starting 0331 are 'non-geographic' numbers, which means that they are not tied to any one particular geographic location and callers may even be abroad,
- Many genuine companies do use 0331 numbers legitimately,
- It is unclear at this time how the scammers obtained the resident's details but it seems unlikely this was a random call generated by an auto-dialler,
- From the last question of the first caller, it appears that the scammers were targeting older people, hence the later call from the second person,
- Never divulge personal or financial details to any cold caller on the phone. Instead, ask them to tell you what details they hold about you and wait for them to do so. If they can't or won't do so, or the information is notably inaccurate, please hang up,
- If you're uncertain, tell the caller that now is not a good time and ask them to call back in an hour. While you are doing this, note their number and check it out on [Who Called Me](#). If it shows up there as suspicious, block it before they call back. Learn how to do this now, for your landline or mobile, in readiness for such calls,
- For mobile phones the [Truecaller](#) app might be helpful. Please remember though to download it from the Apple store or Google Play, rather than directly from a website (as this is a less risky method because Apple and Google should have vetted the app),
- Remember too to report any such instance to your local Trading Standards office, so that they can investigate or offer advice.

QR code scam

One phenomenon which Trading Standards have become aware of recently is a scam involving QR codes, which look similar to this:



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Although they may look a little complicated, QR codes are just another way of encoding information, similar to the bar codes we see on many everyday groceries or hyperlinks we see at the top of web pages when we browse the internet. Indeed, the main purpose of QR codes is to take us to a particular webpage or website. Creating your own QR is also quite straightforward when using reliable services such as [Adobe Express's QR Code Generator](#).

The term being applied to this scam is 'quishing', a play on QR and phishing. We have seen the most common instances of these codes being affixed by way of stickers to parking meters, though we are aware that other people have been affected when they have used QR codes on websites, posters or social media. One such recent news article on the BBC website can be found [here](#).

In every instance, the intent of the QR code has been to direct or misdirect unsuspecting victims to websites where they will be fraudulently charged for services that they did not intend to sign up for such as subscription traps or make payments for a legitimate service, but to a scammer, believing they were paying the legitimate body or person. The end result for the unsuspecting victim is that they may be out of pocket by a substantial amount to the scammer AND may still incur costs or penalties from the legitimate body, which they thought they'd already paid. Sometimes, the bank or credit card details are used to obtain goods fraudulently by the scammer.

Some points to consider:

- When scanning any QR code, please keep a close eye on where it leads you on the internet. If in doubt, shut the page down before you enter any personal or financial information,
- Many of these scam QR codes have been affixed on stickers to items on the street, such as parking meters, flyers or posters. Sometimes fake QR code stickers have been fixed on top of the genuine code, sometimes there was no genuine code to begin with,
- In the case of flyers and posters, look closely to see if the sticker is under any laminate or protective covering or whether it is stuck on the outside. If the latter, be suspicious,
- Aberdeenshire Council do not have QR codes on our parking meters, so if you see one, please report it to the Council via the Council phone number of 01467 536060, by e-mail at carparks@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or online at [report parking meter online](#),
- So far, we have received no complaints of Shire residents falling foul of quishing scams (let's try to keep it like that!),
- Before you use the QR code, look to see if the legitimate body has an app you can download from the Apple Store or Google Play. If so, download and use the app instead of scanning a QR code,

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- If you think you may have fallen victim to a quishing scam, remember to report the matter to your local Trading Standards office to see if they can help you.

Misc.

Become a SCAMchampion or Scam Marshall

If you have ever fallen victim to a scam there some things that you can do about it to fight back and to help and protect others.

Friends Against Scams have a couple of straightforward training packages for people who would like to get involved to become a SCAMchampions or a Scam Marshal.

They describe a SCAMchampion as “SCAMchampions are Friends Against Scams who want to do more. SCAMchampions host awareness sessions to recruit Friends and drive Friends Against Scams forward in their communities or workplace. SCAMchampions attend an additional session to give them a fuller understanding of the laws surrounding scams and some presentation tips.”

Scam Marshals is described as “any resident in the UK who has been targeted by a scam and now wants to fight back and take a stand against scams. Scam Marshals do this by sharing their own experiences, helping others to report and recognise scams and sending any scam mail that they receive to the NTS Scams Team. The scam mail can be used as evidence in future investigative and enforcement work. This work by Scam Marshals plays a huge role in helping to stop the scam mail altogether. “

If you think either of these roles might be for you, please click the following link to find out more about both [Friends Against Scams – Help Others](#).

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.



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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

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 or 01467 538222 during office hours.

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