Vulnerable and Elderly as victims of fraud and rogue trading

More and more, councils are working with law enforcement partners to disrupt serious and organised crime. Serious and organised crime can have a profound impact on an individual family, business or community.

This is particularly prevalent where vulnerability plays a part within individuals, families and communities, as those who are most vulnerable are frequently targeted by organised crime groups and more likely to be exploited.

Although serious and organised crime is often thought of in a regional, national or international context its impact is most felt by local communities.
The Vulnerable Elderly as Victims of Fraud and Rogue Trading

Through effective partnership working and information sharing with statutory and voluntary agencies, we will identify further opportunities to raise awareness of the risks to vulnerable victims of fraud and ensure effective preventative support is in place to address this.

Serious Organised Crime: the elderly and vulnerable victims of fraud and rogue trading associated with serious and organised crime is a priority area of work as identified in our East Sussex Safer Communities Partnerships’ Business Plan 2016/2017.

This will include building on existing initiatives, looking at new partnerships and models of work, targeting those who may be isolated and highlighting the wider links to serious organised crime.

In working towards the above objective we have established a ‘Scams Working Group’ with a core membership made up from:

- ESCC Trading Standards, Public Health and Adult Social Care
- East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
- Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner
- Sussex Police

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Whilst the core membership of this group is static, the nature of how we are looking to address the issues means that depending on the focus of the meeting then additional people will be invited to attend - this will include the voluntary and community services.

The three main issues identified in an engagement event we held back in January that need to be addressed were:

- Development of a shared understanding of the profile of victims, offenders and locations
- Co-ordination of communication activities and consistent messaging
- Collectively working with the voluntary, community and housing sectors
- Developing joint working with health partners
- Understand the different referral mechanisms that exist for people to access support in order to streamline safeguarding and support processes

As a result of this, the group have signed off a partnership action plan which has 5 key elements looking to address the above issues:

- Information sharing and data access
- Communication and awareness raising
- Improved planning of support for repeat victims

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In working through the action plan, to date partners have been finalising an Information Sharing Agreement and have received an overview of ‘The Cube’ which ESFRS use to inform home safety visits and to address other health and wellbeing issues.

Work has also been done with ESFRS around the format and types of data required to be able to add data from partners into this system. This will be focused around identified and agreed ‘vulnerabilities’. This will help identify potential areas where the most vulnerable have been identified for some targeted work.

In order to understand more fully the services and interventions that are in place for victims of fraud and rogue trading, the Safer East Sussex Team have started to map a victim’s journey. This helps to:

- Identify appropriate opportunities to draw on the support of non-statutory partners, whether it is in relation to preventative work or for aftercare following any interventions from statutory agency involvement.
- This would assist with avoiding duplication and help with clear pathways to support available
- Help identify ways of supporting people to prevent them from becoming repeat victims.

We will continue to explore ways of raising awareness of what the most current risks are, as well as looking at support mechanisms that are in place for vulnerable victims, drawing on and developing links with statutory and voluntary services.

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Scams Awareness Month - July 2016

Sussex Police have been working with partners for Scams Awareness Month, and a lot of activity has taken place across the county. This has included awareness sessions at shopping centres, hospitals and other venues across East Sussex.

In Sussex, those over 65 are especially at risk of being targeted by fraudsters. During the month, Sussex officers, staff and volunteers have been joining forces with Trading Standards, the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner and her Elders’ Commission, Neighbourhood Watch and Adult Social Care for a range of preventative measures including: an opportunity for the public to get crime prevention advice at a range of events, including Eastbourne 999 Day and home visits from uniformed Cadets and other volunteers offering crime prevention advice.

Police Public Engagement Officers have been active within their respective communities, and looked to source some good links in order to share scam awareness messages as well as providing practical advice on dealing with nuisance calls and rogue traders.


For a full calendar of public events for Scams Awareness Month click on the following link: http://www.sussex.police.uk/media/3626/external-events-template.pdf
Operation Signature

Operation Signature is the force campaign to identify and support vulnerable victims of fraud within Sussex.

- 1 in 5 people fall victim to scams every year
- Nearly 50% of all adults have been targeted by a scam

Increasingly fraud is becoming more complex and deceptive, much of which is targeted at vulnerable and elderly people.

Common fraud types are:

- Mail scams: con artists use fake lotteries and prize draws, get-rich-quick schemes, bogus health cures and pyramid selling to get money from their victims
- Investment scams: the victim is offered investment opportunities in land, fine wines, share sales or carbon credits which have little or no value
- Romance scams: the scammer meets someone on a dating site and gains their trust. They tell their victim they need money for a family emergency or flights over to see them
- Courier scams: fraudsters call and trick the victim into handing cards and PIN numbers to a courier on their doorstep
- Fraud recovery scam: when fraudsters approach the victim again under a different guise, such as Trading Standards or Court officials, demanding money up front in order to finance court action to recoup some of the losses from the original crime.

How did this all begin?

Op Signature began as the Sussex Police response to scam mail but quickly it became apparent that those being targeted by scam mail were also vulnerable to other scams.

The prevention methods we used to protect victims from scam mail were the same whether they were being targeted by mail, telephone or email.

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The remit of this operation has therefore been extended to include other forms of fraud including investment, dating, inheritance, courier, doorstep, computer and telephone scams - any fraud type where the victim is vulnerable. Therefore, Op Edisto (courier fraud) now falls within the Op Signature remit.

**What is being done about the investigation of these crimes?**

The Op Signature work focuses on the protection of the vulnerable members of our communities in Sussex, preventing them from becoming victims of such fraud and subject to further financial loss.

We have a process for recognising victims of scam mail as victims of crime and providing preventative measures to support and protect them from further targeting, such as helping them to change their phone number to an ex-directory number, contacting family to suggest Power of Attorney, mail re-direction etc.

We also aim to raise awareness of the issue within our communities through our Neighbourhood Policing Teams and the media.

Wherever there are local leads within the UK, investigations are carried out by CID. Where leads are from overseas, these are referred to the National Fraud Office and Action Fraud to take European and international action and intelligence gathering.

Op Signature have launched of a new video which encourages people to spot the signs of fraud and scams when they visit those who may be vulnerable.

The video urges viewers to contact Sussex Police on 101 or via [www.sussex.police.uk](http://www.sussex.police.uk) if they think someone vulnerable is a victim.

**Fraud and Scams – Know the Warning Signs** has been made to raise awareness for anyone who visits the homes of the elderly, vulnerable or socially isolated in a professional, voluntary or social capacity.

[https://youtu.be/tLP9XOofFaCk](https://youtu.be/tLP9XOofFaCk)

Sussex Police Fraud Newsletter June 2016: Keep your money safe
[http://www.sussex.police.uk/media/3473/fraud-newsletter_june-2016.pdf](http://www.sussex.police.uk/media/3473/fraud-newsletter_june-2016.pdf)
The National Trading Standards Scams Team hosted by East Sussex Trading Standards, was set up in 2012 to identify potential victims of mail and telephone fraud. The team helps tackle mass marketing scams and disrupts the operations of perpetrators behind mail scams. It works in partnership with agencies across the country to identify and support victims of mass marketing fraud. The team provides guidance, best practice and establishes a centre of excellence to assist local authorities in supporting local victims and taking local enforcement action.

Recently the team launched an initiative with Royal Mail and Trading Standards Scotland to create a new process for cancelling the contracts of companies that send fraudulent mail. So far over 6,000 items of mail have been returned as part of the operation in the UK and more than £186,985 has been returned to victims.

Friends against Scams is a National Trading Standards Scams Team initiative

Friends against Scams aims to:

- Highlight the scale of the problem by getting communities and the nation talking about scams.
- Change the perceptions of why people become scam victims.
- Prevent people from becoming or continuing to be a scam victim by providing more adequate support.
- Recruit people to join the fight against scams to make this a scam-free nation.
- ANYBODY can join Friends against Scams and make a difference in their own way.

This is a new initiative and further details as they appear will be added to the website: [http://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/](http://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/)
Scams are cruel crimes that damage consumer confidence and at worst blight the lives of victims and their families.

Citizens Advice created a quiz, as part of Scams Awareness Month, to test your scam spotting skills. Take the quiz, spot the clues and share the results with your friends and family.

You’ll be presented with 4 different scams, within each there are a number of clues to indicate it is a scam. Select the part of the screen that you think might be a clue.

When you think you’ve found all the clues, move on to the next scam.

Safeguarding Older People from Abuse and Neglect

Until the Care Act 2014 came into force on 1st April 2015, there was no English law that dealt specifically with safeguarding adults who might be at risk of abuse or neglect.

Section 42(3) of the Care Act 2014 specifies that financial abuse includes:

a) having money or property stolen;

b) being defrauded;

c) being put under pressure in relation to money or other property; and

d) having money or other property misused.

The Care Act 2014 places a lot of emphasis on working together and is particularly important in the safeguarding context.

The local authority and its ‘relevant partners’ are under a legal duty (section 6 of the Care Act 2014) to cooperate with one another. These include:

- NHS England;
- Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs);
- NHS Trusts and Foundation Trusts;
- Department of Work and Pensions (DWP);
- The Police;
- Prisons; and
- Probation services.

Factsheet 7: Protecting adults from abuse or neglect can be found here:


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The Think Jessica campaign was started by Jessica’s daughter Marilyn Baldwin in 2007 after five years of struggling to find help for her mother. Her aim was to educate others about the powerful psychology criminals use to trap their targets and make them understand how this is strong enough to turn them against their loved ones and those trying to help them.

In 2007 Marilyn Baldwin appeared on BBC Breakfast in an attempt to shock the government and postal services into taking action to protect millions of vulnerable people who were sending billions of pounds to fraudsters. She spoke about the victims Think Jessica had been alerted to, some were receiving up to 100 scam letters a day from criminals all over the world.

She appealed to the Royal Mail to put a system in place allowing postal workers to flag up victims by passing on their details to professionals who could help.

After years of constant appeals Marilyn’s persistence finally paid off when in 2014 the Royal Mail and Trading Standards started working together to train postal workers. However by the time many victims are flagged up they already have Jessica’s Scam Syndrome – Think Jessica continues to campaign for protection for those victims.

This is just some of the scam mail removed from Jessica’s home. It was sent by criminals from all over the world including; The Netherlands, Las Vegas, Hong Kong, Switzerland, USA, Singapore, Canada and Australia.

For further information please visit: http://www.thinkjessica.com/

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Call Blocker is like having a home receptionist who lets calls from your friends and family straight through, blocks unwelcome callers, and asks unrecognised callers to identify themselves before it puts them through. This gives victims of unwanted calls peace and quiet at home.

Sussex Police have invested in 100 trueCall devices, which are available to all divisions as a safeguarding measure. External partners such as Trading Standards and Adult Social Care can also nominate suitable vulnerable persons for a trueCall device.

Although other call blocking devices are available, the trueCall devices are the only type available with approval from ACPO Secured by Design and Trading Standards Buy with Confidence.

Over the last two months the project has rolled out across Sussex and early indications are that the statistics look very promising. Those residents who have had a device fitted have seen a significant drop in the number of calls getting through, and they seem to be working effectively to protect the vulnerable victims of telephone-based fraud.

A summary of the results in the first two months of the project is as follows:

- 36 units have been installed
- Users are receiving on average 60 nuisance and scam calls per month (2 per day, and 57% of all calls received)
- A total of 3,330 nuisance calls have been blocked
- The units are going to the right people - 61% of the calls these people are receiving are nuisance calls, and 5 of them are receiving around 100 nuisance calls per month
- trueCall is blocking over 95% of the unwanted calls

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Some of the top fraudulent callers included:

- 15 calls were blocked from a fraudulent double glazing company which has also featured on the BBC
- 13 calls were blocked from a number appearing to be identity theft fraud
- 21 calls were blocked from companies appearing to relate to Microsoft fraud
- 6 calls were blocked from investment fraudsters
- 20 calls were blocked from prize draw fraudsters
- 11 calls were blocked from a number connected to a credit card refund fraud

The recent addition of Action Fraud reports to the ONS (Office of National Statistics) crime reports show the seriousness with which these types of crime are being taken. Within Sussex, around 400 to 500 victims of fraud are reported each month to Action Fraud with around 100 include enough information which can be used for an investigation.

Protective measures such as the installation of trueCall devices can help prevent fraudsters reaching victims, and the initial data from the two months since installation seems to show a significant drop in the number of nuisance calls getting through. The agreement for data from the devices to be shared with us also assists greatly with investigations and identifying those callers which are fraudulent.

Bernadette Lawrie - Financial Abuse Safeguarding Officer

Operation Signature

Our September Newsletter will be focusing on offending so if you have any news/articles or events linked to offending please contact us so we can include it

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You can find local businesses you can trust and rely upon by using the Checkatrade website.

Look out for the ‘East Sussex Trading Standards Approved’ logo to choose local businesses that have been checked by both Trading Standards and Checkatrade.

https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/business/tradingstandards/approved-traders/checkatrade/

Sign up to Action Fraud Alert

http://www.actionfraud.police.uk/support-and-prevention/sign-up-to-action-fraud-alert

ActionFraud is the UK’s national fraud and cyber crime reporting centre. They provide a central point of contact for information about fraud and cyber crime.

You can now sign up for free to Action Fraud Alert to receive direct, verified, accurate information about scams and fraud in your area by email, recorded voice and text message.

The system is provided by the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB) which is run by the City of London Police as a national service. The system uses the Neighbourhood Alert Platform which is a secure, national community messaging facility used by Police, Neighbourhood and Home Watch, Crimestoppers, Fire & Rescue Services and local authorities throughout the UK.

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