

MONTHLY FRAUD UPDATE – April 2022

For the information of all Southend Borough Council staff and the public to enable them to protect themselves, their families and the Council against the most current threats from fraud and cybercrime. Please feel free to distribute these messages to anyone you feel may benefit from them.

This month's update is shorter than usual due to a lower than normal feed of information to me.

Council Tax rebate scams

Criminals are cold calling residents asking for bank details to enable payment of the Council Tax rebate. The Council will NEVER ask for your personal or bank details over the phone. Providing this information could enable the fraudsters access to your money or sufficient information to steal your identity.

My advice for unsolicited calls, texts or emails remains the same. Hang up, never give your personal details, never click on a link in a message, and contact the council/company/bank etc. directly to check if it is genuine if you are concerned.

Although many agencies and businesses are trying hard to find a solution to this sort of scam, I doubt they will ever completely stop it. The best defence will always be to recognise this for what it is and don't engage and be prepared to say no.

Essex Police are also sending out regular counter fraud messages concerning criminals who are experts at impersonating people and organisations. They spend hours researching people and their businesses for their scams, hoping you'll let your guard down.

If something seems too good to be true or not quite right, always check by means you know to be right, such as a legitimate website or a phone number you know. This is also particularly true if the message appears to be from someone you know or do business with. It is always better to be safe than sorry.

Romance Fraud

This is big business for fraudsters. They use information from social media to create fake identities and go to great lengths to make them seem genuine. Once they connect with someone on dating sites or social media, they will try to establish a relationship quickly. They aim to make their victims fall in love with them, then they start asking for money, often due to an emergency, for transport costs if they're overseas, or to help them make an investment. NEVER give money to someone you have never met in person.

Tell-tale signs include:

- Someone you met online declares strong feelings for you after a few conversations.
- They suggest moving the conversation away from the website or social media to more private channels such as email or instant messaging.
- Their online profile is not consistent with what they're telling you.
- There are spelling and grammar mistakes, inconsistencies in their story and make claims like their camera isn't working.
- They refuse to call or meet you in person.

OFFICIAL

- They get angry or try to rush you if you insist on staying on the dating site or ask to meet face to face.
- Photos generally tend to be stolen from other people if you know how, do a reverse image check online.
- You are asked to send money to someone you have not met face to face, either through bank transfer or purchase of gift cards or presents.
- A friend or family member becomes secretive or defensive about their relationship with someone they met online and why they have not video called or met them in person.

Fraud advice and tips

Essex Police provide advice and information [here](#).

Kind regards

Shaun

REMEMBER, IF IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE, THEN IT IS.



'Tell2 over a brew' is a communication initiative that empowers you to discuss crime prevention messages with others in your life, who otherwise may never know. Start with 'tell2' and ask them to do the same. An unbroken chain of 26 tell2'ers would reach 67 million people. It starts with YOU!



'Take Five' is a national campaign to offer straight-forward, impartial advice that helps prevent email, phone-based and online fraud – particularly where criminals impersonate trusted organisations. Find out more at www.takefive-stopfraud.org.uk.

If you suspect someone is trying to defraud the Council call the Counter Fraud & Investigation Team on 01702 215254 or email us at counterfraud@southend.gov.uk.

If you or someone you know is vulnerable and has been a victim of fraud, please call Essex Police on 101.

Report fraud or attempted fraud by contacting Action Fraud at www.actionfraud.police.uk or call 0300 123 2040.

OFFICIAL