

Police launch major campaign to protect people from fraud

Police Scotland is running a major campaign to help people protect themselves from fraud – which has become one of the most commonly experienced crimes in the country.

Cases of criminals exploiting vulnerable and unsuspecting people and persuading them to part with money or personal information are continuing to rise.



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During the six-week campaign, in partnership with Take Five to Stop Fraud, officers will also warn that criminals are becoming more sophisticated and convincing in their methods, and taking advantage of advances in technology.

Latest Scottish Government figures show that in 2019-20, fraud increased by 23% and since 2010-11 has gone up by 33%.

In the last year (April 2019- March 2020) there were 11,939 crimes of fraud recorded in Scotland – including many committed online, as criminals use the internet more and more to target victims. An increase of 2,264 crimes the previous year.

Throughout the campaign members of the public and businesses will be encouraged to follow straightforward and impartial advice – Stop, Challenge and Protect – aimed at reducing the chances of becoming a victim of financial fraud. This includes online fraud, email deception as well as phone-based and social media scams.

Essential information will be advertised on social media, digital screens as well as on Spotify.

Deputy Chief Constable Malcolm Graham said: "Fraud, in any form, is a despicable and cowardly crime with, often anonymous criminals targeting the most vulnerable people in our communities. We know these faceless crooks will take any opportunity to exploit any situation to their own nefarious advantage.

"We are well aware that fraud continues to rise and want to take the opportunity to warn the public and businesses take a few steps to protect themselves and remain vigilant.

"Our advice is clear and the public should be aware that a telephone call, email or text may not be from the person or organisation it appears to come from. Never click on a link from an unsolicited email or text, and remember that banks, police or other legitimate organisations will never ask you for personal banking information or ask you to move funds to a different account.

"With people spending more and more of their time in the cyber and digital space and the growth of the internet has seen otherwise traditional crimes, such as fraud, being carried out online. Our ambitious Cyber Strategy, published in September, sets a clear direction for how we will tackle the threat, risk and harm from digitally-enabled crimes including fraud."

Cabinet Secretary for Justice Humza Yousaf said: "While levels of crime including those involving robbery, housebreaking and theft have fallen over the last decade, reported cases of fraud have risen by a third over the same period, at a time when we have all increased our use of online and mobile technologies.

"During 2020 we have seen unscrupulous individuals using the lockdown and on-going restrictions as an opportunity to target some of our most vulnerable citizens and exploit businesses.

Such criminal behaviour is absolutely abhorrent and the Scottish Government is working with police and other partners to pursue those who cause harm and misery to our communities and to support people to stay safe.

“As we enter the festive season, I welcome Police Scotland’s timely campaign urging people to ‘stop, challenge and protect’ in order to help households, businesses and communities to keep themselves safe and secure this Christmas and into 2021. In addition anyone can sign up to receive trusted alerts and advice from Neighbourhood Watch Scotland on a range of safety and security issues targeted to their local area.”

Katy Worobec, Managing Director of Economic Crime at UK Finance said: “The banking and finance industry is committed to protecting customers from scams and is working closely with law enforcement and others to target the criminal gangs responsible, with almost £7 in £10 of fraud prevented in the first half of this year.

“Criminals are experts at impersonating people, organisations and the police. Particularly with the impact of Covid-19 and an increasingly digitised society, criminals are ruthlessly adapting their methods to target consumers online, via social media and over the phone. These scams are often sophisticated and well-researched: we encourage customers to be wary of unsolicited calls, emails, or text messages and avoid clicking in links in any unexpected correspondence.

“We would urge people to follow the advice of the Take Five to Stop Fraud campaign to keep themselves safe from fraud. Always take a moment to stop and think before parting with your money or information, and don’t let a criminal rush or panic you into making a decision that you’ll later come to regret.”

Deputy Chief Constable Graham added: “Sadly, during the current pandemic when people have been at home, the occurrence of fraud has also risen. Our management information showed

that fraud increased by 45% in the first six months of 2020-21 compared to the same period last year.

“Police Scotland is absolutely committed to working with a wide range of partners to pursue anyone who sets out to cause harm and misery in our communities and make Scotland a hostile environment for them to operate.

“We remain vigilant and I would urge the public to do the same to reduce the risk of becoming a victim.”