

WHAT WAS NEW 2011

Public Protection Service – Trading Standards



COUNCIL TAX SCAM

Plymouth residents have been receiving telephone calls from people claiming to be from our Council Tax Department, stating they are due a large refund.

Residents are then asked to provide their bank details so that a refund can be made.

Plymouth City Council do not, and would not, make these telephone calls and would never telephone unexpectedly about a council tax refund or ask for bank or credit card details by telephone to process a refund.

If you receive such a call you should refuse to disclose any information and phone the Council on 01752 668000. Our staff will confirm whether any refund is outstanding and if so arrange a refund in the normal manner.

We take many payments securely by telephone every day from residents, but we do not refund to cards. If anyone has passed details of their bank or credit card to anyone recently about a refund, they should contact their bank branch or card company immediately.

Any resident who receives such a call should also report it to [Consumer Direct](#) on 08454 040506 or [Action Fraud](#) on 0300 123 2040.

Scams awareness month

Help crack down on scams - bin your scam mail!

Plymouth Trading Standards service is joining forces with the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) in a bid to raise awareness of mass marketed scams and to gain an insight as to how our local residents are affected.

As part of a nationwide Scams Awareness Month special 'Scamnesty' bins will be located in specific locations in Plymouth throughout the month of February. Plymouth residents are being asked to place their scam mail in the bins so Trading Standards and the OFT can obtain intelligence which can be used to target those who set up these scams.

The bins will be at libraries from Tuesday 1 to Friday 28 February. There will also be a bin in the reception area of the Civic Centre.

If you or someone you know has fallen victim to scams and would like advice and support please contact [Consumer Direct](#) on 08454 040506.

Plymouth Business Directory

Plymouth launched a new online business directory on 1 March 2011 which provides a comprehensive tool for those seeking or promoting local goods and services with a free interactive search facility.

If your company falls within the Plymouth city boundary and you pay business rates to Plymouth City Council, you are eligible to be included within the directory.

Plymouth City Trading Standards warn of bogus scam letters

People in Plymouth are being targeted by a scam letter suggesting that they are a beneficiary to a large trust fund. The letter offers people a huge payment provided the 'Private Investment Manager' can retain a portion of the money. The letter has a telephone number and an email address and purports to come from a Tim Wu

The letter is personalised so that the recipient has the same name as the alleged deceased person but Trading Standards warn that this is just a ploy to get people to respond. Once consumers have responded they may be asked for bank details which are then used to access their account, alternatively, they may be asked for an upfront fee, either way people do not see a penny of the promised payment. People are advised to bin the letters.

The National Audit Office recently reported that bogus emails alone had conned consumers out of an estimated £3.5bn a year, and the overall cost of unfair trading is estimated to be more than £6bn annually.

If anyone has fallen victim to a scam then they are advised to contact Action Fraud on 0300 1232040 or via www.actionfraud.org.uk.

General consumer advice is provided by Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 or via www.direct.gov.uk

Suspended prison sentence for counterfeit clothing seller

Andrew Pollard of Carradale Close, Austin Farm, Plymouth was sentenced to 8 months imprisonment suspended for two years plus an unpaid work requirement of 250 hours. Judge Francis Gilbert also ordered forfeiture of all the clothing seized. Costs of £3000 were awarded.

Pollard was caught in October 2009 selling clothing from a shop unit in Wyndham Place, Plymouth. Windows of the shop were blacked out giving it the appearance of a derelict property. Police had stopped two youths carrying items of branded clothing in a nearby lane. Police initially thought that the youths had stolen the clothing but the youths led them to the shop unit where inside over 1000 items of branded clothing were found.

Trading Standards officers attended and seized the poor quality clothing footwear, jewelry and perfume, which had it been genuine would have had a market value of over £90,000. The items were all sent away for examination by the brand owners, and found to be counterfeit.

Pollard asked the court to take 54 offences into consideration.

Judge Gilbert said that the Court of Appeal has stated that this type of offence must carry some deterrent and generally this would mean a short period of imprisonment. Pollard was given some leniency for entering a guilty plea.

Scam Letter Shock

Plymouth Trading Standards was contacted by Mrs Cooper, a Plymouth resident regarding vast amount of scam mail which belonged to her uncle who passed away in 2008.

A total of 26 boxes of mail were found after his death. Each containing thousands of pieces of mail which it appears were replied to. On most of the envelopes the uncle had printed how much money was sent and on what date. Some of the mailings were the same one sent time and time again. They included clairvoyants, prize draw letters, astrologers and letters from organisations of which the uncle was a member, just to mention a few

Mrs Cooper's uncle died owing £13 500 in debts but the overall amount spent on the scams is incalculable. Officers from trading standards had never seen so much scam mail before from one person.

Trading Standards Participate in a week of community Events

Residents of Mutley and Greenbank will be the focus of the emergency services, council and probation staff over the coming week.

The community focus week is run with the aim of providing advice and dealing with concerns raised by residents.

The multi-agency teams including the Police, Fire Service and Community Safety Partnership will spend the week visiting the university, groups for the elderly and parents with young children, as well as carrying out a speed watch campaign at the local school.

Trading Standards staff will be visiting residential homes in the area to make people aware of scams which target the more elderly.

The events will close on 30 September with a roadshow event for the public at Greenbank Fire Station, starting at 2pm.

City Councillor Glenn Jordan, cabinet member for community safety, said: "This event helps remind the people who live here that they can talk to the various organisations about any issues they have. We are all here to help make this area even better."

Seized fake clothing to help people in need

Vulnerable and disadvantaged people in Plymouth will be benefiting from successful court cases brought by Plymouth City Council's Trading Standards.

Officers are taking part in an exchange with a charity which will see tonnes of forfeited counterfeit clothing being taken away and rebranded.

Counterfeit clothing and trainers with an estimated street value of £184,000 were forfeited following three successful court cases. In the past the Council destroyed counterfeit goods of this kind and sent them to landfill. But now Trading Standards has teamed up with His Church Charity which removes the fake labels from the clothes and rebrands them.

When the charity comes to pick up the fake goods this week it will also bring back rebranded counterfeit clothing that was originally seized in Plymouth. The clothes will be donated to the Salvation Army.

Councillor Glenn Jordan, Cabinet Member for Community Services (Safer and Stronger Communities, Culture, Sport and Leisure) said: "It's great that vulnerable and disadvantaged people will benefit from the work of our Trading Standards officers and their efforts to combat counterfeiting.

"We will continue to crack down hard on fakes products. They damage the local economy, consumers and it is a deliberate attempt to trick people into buying inferior goods."

Crackdown on Plymouth's rogue traders

ROGUE traders will come under the spotlight as a week-long offensive to help the public against their illegal activities starts on 17 October.

Plymouth City Council's Trading Standards team is leading an action week that aims to make life tough for those traders who deliberately flout laws and give the public a raw deal.

Advice and assistance will also be available for those traders who want to do business by the book. Teams will be out and about in parts of the city previously affected by doorstep crime to educate, reassure and offer advice on what to do if someone knocks on the door offering to do work and who to contact if they have concerns.

Officers will also check which traders are working in particular areas and will visit suppliers to remind them to contact the council if they become suspicious of rogue trader activity.

If you wish to report suspected rogue traders then contact Consumer Direct on 08454 040506 or via www.direct.gov.uk.

Trading Standards are also reminding consumers, particularly the more vulnerable, about the Buy with Confidence scheme.

This scheme is a register of contractors that are checked for their trustworthiness and fair business practices, and monitored to make sure standards remain high.

Almost 100 companies in Plymouth are now part this scheme which was set up in response to complaints about home maintenance works.

Are you safely switched on?

People are being encouraged to keep safe and warm this winter by getting their electrical equipment tested.

Plymouth City Council's Trading Standards team is holding free testing sessions in an effort to cut down the number of fires caused by faulty equipment such as electric heaters.

Electric blankets, portable heaters and kettles can be taken for a check-up at Age Concern and the Jan Cutting Healthy Living Centre and there's the chance to make sure fairy or Christmas lights are safe for the festive season.

People can bring along up to three items to be tested at the events which have been organised, thanks to a £3,000 grant from the Electrical Safety Council.

Electrically-related fires account for almost half of all accidental fires in UK homes and are usually caused by electrical faults, or incorrect use of electrical appliances.

A limited number of free electric blankets and kettles are available, or a limited number of Beacon Electrical gift vouchers to help towards the cost of a new appliance, if the old appliance does not pass the safety test.

Please contact Trading Standards on 01752 304141 for further details.

Specialist team leads crackdown on city's loan sharks

Plymouth City Council is hosting the launch of the England Illegal Money Lending Team in the city on Tuesday 29 November. It aims to spread the word to other organisations such as housing associations and charities about how they can work with the team to tackle illegal money lenders.

The government-funded England Illegal Money Lending Team works with local councils and communities to deal with loan sharks and is now authorised to work in Plymouth.

Up to 30 specialist investigators can be deployed to the city if there is information about illegal lenders operating. Officers will work with communities and local agencies to raise awareness and provide support for victims.

An estimated 310,000 households nationally borrow from illegal money lenders. These criminals prey on some of the most vulnerable people causing stress and sometimes physical harm to people who have limited finances.

They often charge huge interest rates – the highest seen is 131,000 per cent APR – and as ‘debts’ owed to loan sharks aren’t legally enforceable, they may resort to threats and violence to ensure payment. Few offer paperwork, so victims are in the dark about what they owe. In some cases passports, driving licences are taken or bank or post office cards with PINs to draw directly from people’s accounts.

The Council’s Trading Standards service has signed an agreement with the team and will help co-ordinate the city’s response to this problem.

To report a loan shark call the 24/7 confidential hotline 0300 555 2222, text ‘loan shark + your message’ to 60003, email reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk or visit the [Directgov](#) website.