

Essex edition WatchOut

MAY 2017

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Carol Vorderman was once a fraud victim, now she is a fraud ambassador - see P5

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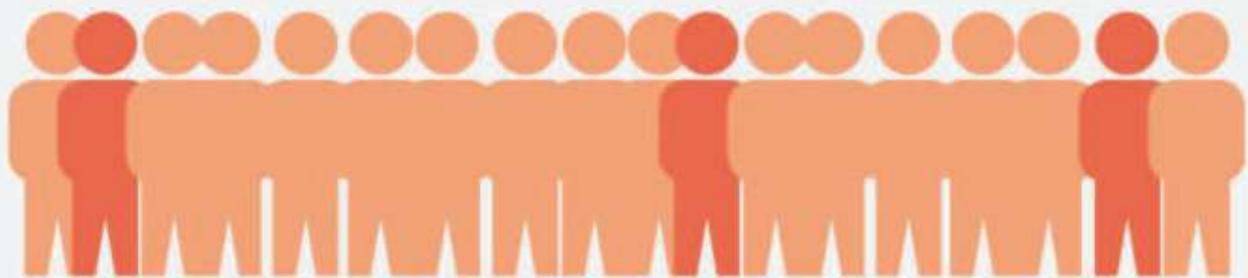
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So when you're thinking about choosing your next tradesperson, take the guess work out of your decision and don't be the victim of a rogue trade.



Holidaymakers enjoying the sun in Benidorm

Holiday food horror

British tourists to Spain may soon be asked to prove that they have food poisoning in a bid to stop a claims epidemic

By Peter Faulkner

BRITISH holidaymakers are facing a backlash in Spain for making up food poisoning allegations.

Spanish hotels have decided they have had enough of British dishonesty and are fighting back to weed out the cheats.

The scam has become so widespread since summer 2016 that Benidorm's hotel association, Hosbec, has demanded that British tourists should have to produce a prescription in food poisoning cases "to provide evidence that the complaint is real and not a scam".

Until now the dishonest tourists have waited till they got home to England to make a claim – with no-win no-fee solicitors queuing up to line their pockets.

Under new proposals British tourists would have to get a prescription for common over-the-counter sickness medications to show that a doctor has diagnosed food poisoning.

Affecting the whole sector Hosbec President



Antoni Mayor told Spanish daily newspaper El Mundo that the step is also being considered by other destinations popular with Brits.

"There can be no sense of impunity because it is a problem that we cannot allow to go any further," Mr Mayor said. "It is not just something that is happening in Benidorm or the Costa Blanca, but something that is affecting the entire sector."

The scam involves British tourists claiming poor quality hotel food has given them food poisoning in a bid to get their money refunded.

They often wait until they have returned to the UK – too late to obtain proof of the food poisoning from a local Spanish doctor – and then file cases with small claims courts or complain directly to their tour operators.

Some unscrupulous no-win, no-fee solicitors have been touting for business before tourists have even left Spain and there have been reports of lawyers driving around popular resorts in vans with signs such as "claims clinic".

Contracts between British tour operators and hotels state that the financial responsibility rests with the hotel, so if the travel operator refunds the customer the hotel pays the price. This leaves Spanish hotels and resorts in an extremely vulnerable position.

It is estimated the Spanish hotel industry has lost /60 million (£52 million) in the last year alone.

With the burden of proof resting on them, hotels say they have to take action – and some Spanish politicians have also stepped in, with Benidorm senator Agustín Almodóbar promising a crackdown on false complaints.

"We are all united against an unjust and fraudulent practice," he said.

A novel idea

THE City of London Police, the lead force for fraud, has written a how to book on countering fraud and economic crime.

The book, which is aimed at economic crime practitioners, is published by Blackstone Publishing and will become part of their Practical Policing series.

This was a collaborative project and harvested the skills and knowledge from across the force and experienced investigators from a range of other agencies.

It has taken five years to develop, compile and edit to ensure that the book gives a thorough introduction to the reader of the foundation of investigating fraud and economic crime.

The book builds on City of London Police's work as lead force for fraud and its international reputation in dealing with complex national and international investigations.

The profits from the book will go back to the force to help in the fight against fraud and economic crime.

There is a special 20% discount on the book until the end June 2017 making the book £31.99 to purchase. It is available online from various book sellers.

FCA complaints

SCAMS and potential stings are among the main reasons people contact the Financial Conduct Authority's (FCA) Consumer Contact Centre, according to new data released by the regulator.

The centre is the main point of contact for financial services consumers and the FCA handled nearly 107,000 calls between December 1, 2015 and November 30, 2016, a decrease of 10 per cent on the previous year.

More than a third (36 per cent) were from people checking on the status of firms to see if they were regulated by the FCA; a further 15 per cent related to how people were treated by firms in areas such as claims handling and arrears or repossession queries; and 13 per cent were reports or inquiries about potential or actual scams.

The regulator also revealed the most common stings – a list topped by advance fee fraud, which saw a 42 per cent rise in contact centre calls.

Boiler room scams were the second most common accounting for 28 per cent of the total.

Home and away

Shock for dodgy dealers

A COUPLE of suspected dodgy dealers who were preying on an elderly woman got a shock - when two police officers answered the door.

The incident happened in Wellington Avenue, St Ives after police were told by the victim how she allowed a man to carry out some gardening work, but the men asked for more than the agreed bill.

The men disputed the pay and returned later that day and attempted to enter the house before vowing to return in the morning. It was then that the resident called police who waited for the men - and gave them a verbal bashing.

The lady allowed a man to do some gardening work for her but when she came to pay him the agreed sum, he asked for more money, which the lady refused.

However, later in the evening he returned on a pretext and wanted to enter the house, which the lady again refused, but the man said he would return in the morning.

"Concerned for the lady's safety, officers visited her on the Tuesday morning and were able to warn two male suspects to leave the area and not return," said a police spokesman.

Delhi bank tops for fraud

THE CICI Bank of New Delhi topped the list of banks that witnessed most number of frauds from April to December last year with state-owned SBI taking the second spot.

During the first nine months of the current financial year, as many as 455 fraud cases involving Rs 1 lakh and above were detected in ICICI Bank, closely followed by SBI (429), Standard Chartered (244) and HDFC Bank (237).

The other banks which reported large number of frauds to the apex bank during the period include Axis Bank (189), Bank of Baroda (176) and Citibank (150).

The data provided by RBI to the Finance Ministry also revealed the involvement of bank staffs in fraud cases.

In the case of SBI, 64 employees were involved in fraud cases, while it was 49 for HDFC Bank and 35 for Axis Bank.

In all, 450 employees were involved in fraud cases in different public and private sector banks during April-December 2016, in 3,870 cases involving a total value of Rs 17,750.27 crore.

Police stations sold off

TWO Essex police stations have been sold to developers adding almost £2 million to the police coffers.

Westcliff Police Station, in Claremont Road, Southend, was sold for £781,500 and follows on the heels of Rochford Police Station in West Street, which went for £925,000.

Both stations were sold by Southend agents Ayers and Cruiks.

When the buildings were up for sale, Police and Crime Commissioner Roger Hirst said: "I will continue to drive the modernisation of Essex Police stations and buildings, refurbishing key sites and closing and selling those buildings that are no longer suitable for our policing purposes."

Cracking down on fakes

OFFICIALS in Dubai and Saudi Arabia ordered the shutting down of thousands of social network accounts which were being used to sell fake goods, as authorities continue their battle against the illegal trade.

Dubai's Department of Economic Development (DED) ordered the closure of 8,894 social network accounts it said were used to sell the knock-off items online, in a move designed to protect brands and eliminate practices that could harm the growing e-commerce sector in the emirate.

In a similar move, Saudi Arabia's ministry of trade and investment shut down around 75 accounts on various social media, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, for posting thousands of fake good ads.

Last month the DED reported that 67.7 million pieces of counterfeit goods, worth approximately 1.16 billion dirhams (\$315.81 million) were confiscated in 2016, with mobile phones topping the list.

Tour operator goes bust

SHORT break specialist tour operator Diamond Shortbreak Holidays announced it had ceased trading on 15 March, resulting in thousands of Britons' holidays being can-

celled. The company, which was based in Market Harborough, offered a range of trips including city breaks, river cruises, walking holidays and coach and rail trips.

An estimated 16,000 people have had their holidays scrapped as a result of the company's financial difficulties.

A statement has been issued on its website, saying: "It is with deep regret that we announce that Diamond Shortbreak Holidays Ltd which includes The River Cruise Line has ceased trading on 15 March 2017.

"Anyone that has booked a holiday with us will be contacted in due course as sadly your holiday booking will not go ahead."

Thankfully for customers the operator was an ABTA member, meaning holidaymakers are protected and can claim a refund.

Priest stole £50,000

A CATHOLIC priest has admitted that he fraudulently diverted thousands of pounds donated to his church by members of the congregation.

Fr John Reid, 69, pleaded guilty to defrauding St Cuthbert's Church in Stockton of donation money over a four-year period.

Parishioners believed the money was going toward the upkeep of the church building and to charities but instead Fr John spent the money on foreign travel and at restaurants.

It is believed that Fr John had taken at least £50,000 of church money between June 2009 and October 2013. Fr John was also accused of failing to keep proper accounts and abusing his position.

At a previous hearing, Fr John pleaded not guilty to all the charges but Durham Crown Court heard he had changed his plea and admitted to one charge of fraud.

Following his arrest in 2014, Fr John voluntarily withdrew from his ministry. He was due to be sentenced as we went to press.

Crooks turn to leasing

AUTOMOTIVE data company Cap HPI has warned UK-based leasing companies to be vigilant after learning criminals are using them to fraudulently obtain high-performance cars.

The information has come from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau, which said that cars are being leased using false information.

Cap HPI said that leasing cars gives criminals the chance to move the vehicles abroad and change index plates and bodywork to mask the original identity of the car, as a leasing company may be less likely to notice a stolen car compared with a private owner.

The data giant said cars are typically shipped to countries such as Cyprus, Spain and Poland, and added the criminals "have no intention of bringing them back to the UK".

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Carol Vorderman during her Countdown days

Carol is figuring it out

"I've been a victim of credit card fraud myself. It was horrible, disconcerting, scary and it also feels a bit embarrassing."

By Staff Reporter

WHEN it comes to figures there are few people who can get the better of mathematics genius Carol Vorderman, the former host of television's Countdown programme.

But that didn't stop criminals her becoming a victim of financial fraud.

Crooks managed to fraudulently take money from her bank account and now Ms Vorderman is helping people like you and me safeguard their finances.

She is one of the new ambassadors of Financial Fraud Action UK's Scam Academy along with celebrities Donna Air and Rufus Hound.

As part of Take Five - a national campaign to help consumers and businesses stop fraud - Scam Academy aims to raise awareness of the often simple methods the scammers use.

In a series of videos, the three ambassadors were put through their paces by three experts in the fraud sector: Alexis Conran of the BBC's Real Hustle, technical consultant Scott McGready and of the Dedicated Card and Payment Crime Unit.

"As a victim of financial fraud myself, I think Scam Academy is an excellent way to raise awareness of a very serious issue," said Ms Vorderman

"I've been a victim of credit card fraud myself. It was horrible, disconcerting, scary and an invasion of privacy.

"It also feels a bit embarrassing and you feel a

bit stupid – and that is absolutely not how people should feel. Don't suffer in silence. I've learnt, through this campaign, that no one should feel embarrassed – fraud needs to be reported and discussed.

"Of course you must report it to your bank and the police, but it's also important to tell your friends and family too so that they know what to watch out for.

The Take Five campaign says people can go a long way towards protecting themselves by remembering a few basic principles.

■ Don't assume an email request or caller is genuine – people aren't always who they say they are - and don't let yourself be rushed. A bank or genuine organisation won't mind waiting to give you time to stop and think.

■ Listen to your instincts; if something feels wrong then it probably is.

■ Never disclose your security details, such as your PIN or full password, and have the confidence to refuse any other unusual requests for information.

"The ultimate aim of Scam Academy is to highlight that it pays to 'Take Five' if you're ever asked for financial or personal details. If you're ever unsure, never hesitate to contact the organisation in question," said Carol.

"If it's your bank or your credit card provider, use a number you trust such as the one listed on their website or on the back of your payment card."

Cold case appeal

THE mother of a teenage boy who was shot in their family home 10 years ago has issued a heartfelt plea for anyone with information about his murder to come forward.

In addition to this latest appeal detectives have offered a £20,000 reward leading to the identification, arrest and prosecution of the person(s) responsible for the death of Billy Cox.

Billy who was 15-years-old at the time of his death, left Acre Lane, Brixton, at 14:36hrs on February, 14, 2007 and made his way home to Fenwick Place, Clapham.

His sister, then aged 13, returned to their home a short time after and as she neared the door, she heard a 'bang.' Inside, she found her brother dying.

A friend turned up and helped her to give first aid whilst they waited for an ambulance. There were no signs of forced entry and detectives believe Billy may have known his attacker.

Teen sentenced

A TEENAGER has been sentenced for firearms and drugs offences in Islington.

Hugo Borges, 18, from Islington was sentenced at Blackfriars Crown Court to seven years in a young offenders institute after previously pleading guilty to possession of a prohibited weapon (a handgun), possession of ammunition without a certificate and two counts two count of possession of a controlled drug (heroin and cocaine) with intent to supply.

Borges was seen to discard what appeared to be a firearm through the letterbox of a nearby address before he was detained.

When searched, Borges was found to be in possession of approximately 53 wraps of crack cocaine and 38 wraps of heroin.

Groomed at 14

A MAN who groomed a young girl and engaged in a sexual relationship has been jailed for 15 months at Inner London Crown Court.

Patrick Michael Bradfield, 31, of Vicarage Road, Bexley, had earlier pleaded guilty two counts of sexual activity with a child under 15.

Bradfield targeted his victim, who was 14 at the time of the offence, at the Bexley stables where he worked.

Cop had child images

AN Essex police officer escaped prison despite downloading 1,600 indecent images of children.

Canvey-based PC Clive Hansen was caught with some of the most vile images of child sexual abuse imaginable in November last year.

Judge David Goodin, sitting at Ipswich Crown Court, referred to the Essex Police officer's "exemplary" conduct previously and urged him to stop looking at this type of "stuff".

Hansen, 53, of Borrowdale Close, Benfleet, had previously admitted three counts of making indecent pictures and one offence of possessing a prohibited image of a child.

He was handed a four month jail term, suspended for 12 months.

Officers seized a laptop at his home and Hansen was caught with 17 images at category A, the most extreme abuse, 26 at category B and 1,576 at category C, as well as another prohibited image.

Stop boy racers

ARE you fed up with noisy, nuisance vehicles causing you sleepless nights? Racing up and down your streets, putting you and others at risk?

Essex Police receive daily complaints about this type of activity and this time of the year there will be an increase in this kind of anti social behaviour.

However your local community policing team are committed to addressing this blight on the community. If you witness ASB involving vehicles, please contact Essex Police and report it. Unless you tell them they won't be aware of it.

Time, date, place, make and model of the offending vehicles would help police address offending behaviour and nail the culprits.

If you have dash cam or CCTV footage that shows the offenders committing offences this can be used as court evidence.

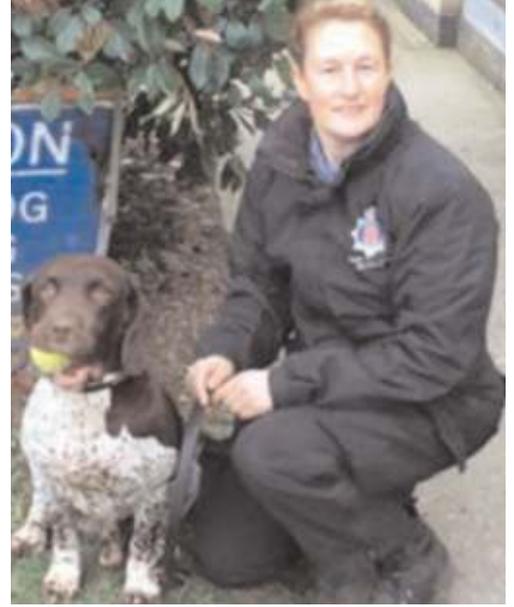
Contact Essex Police on 101 (999 in an emergency) or report online www.essex.police.uk/doitonline.

Dogs have their day

Two police dogs prove top class as they pick up awards in top trials while it's farewell to Bruno the drug dog



Cesar with PC Graham Nuth



Bruno and PC Amanda Pollard

IT'S been a doggone grand time for Essex police dogs with two of them - Cesar and Tex - picking up awards in the Eastern Regional Police dog trials.

But while Cesar and Tex chase silverware, another police dog, Bruno, is retiring after 10 years serving Essex Police as a drugs, money and weapons recovery dog, police dog Bruno is retiring.

Bruno is one of the longest serving search and recovery dogs for Essex Police. He has been responsible for several people being brought to justice due to finding items which officers were not able to find with their initial search.

For the last two years, he has been working with Pc Amanda Pollard of the Dog Section.

After a decade of work, Bruno will be joining a small family where he will be the only dog in their household.

With Bruno leaving a space for a search and recovery dog, the dog section will be gaining a new addition, Pablo.

Pablo has been progressing well with his puppy walker, showing talent very early on. He

will be starting his training with Amanda in the upcoming months.

In the Eastern Regional Police Dog trials at Bedfordshire police headquarters Essex picked up crowns for the overall winner and the best overall team.

Pc Graham Nuth and Pc Luke Pitchford along with Cesar and Tex represented the county after coming top in the Essex Police dog trials.

Graham, currently Essex Dog Handler of the Year, and German Shepherd Cesar were crowned as the overall winners bringing home the 'Essex Cup' for the second consecutive win for our dog section. The pair also won the trophies for Best Man Work, which saw them detaining a suspect.

Graham and Cesar will soon represent the Eastern Region in the National Police Dog Trials which will be hosted by Avon and Somerset Police in May.

Not only did Graham scoop overall winner but both he and Luke along with 7-year-old Cesar and 2-year-old Tex came home with the best overall team gong - the third consecutive year that Essex has won.

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The nice guy bailiffs from the Can't Pay Won't Pay television series

Control thug bailiffs

Charities are demanding the setting up of an independent regulator to control bailiffs powers and safeguard residents in debt

By Staff Reporter

DEBT advice charities want the Government to appoint a separate regulator to control bailiffs.

In a special report entitled Taking Control, AdviceUK, the StepChange debt charity and the Children's Society, claim that many bailiffs are still abusing their powers.

People have complained that they have been intimidated by bailiffs even though the law was changed three years ago to protect residents.

Together the charities have called for the establishment of an independent regulator for bailiffs, and a single and simple way for people to complain about over-zealous bailiffs.

The laws to regulate bailiffs in England and Wales were aimed at protecting debtors from any unfair behaviour.

But a consortium of charities, which included the three organisations above, says these new rules have failed to rein in some rogue bailiffs.

The government will soon begin a review of the laws.

Bailiffs are typically used by creditors, on the authority of the courts, to seize property if

debtors fail to pay what they owe. The 2014 laws should have provided debtors with protection against over-aggressive bailiffs.

For instance, the current laws ban bailiffs from entering homes at night, acting without proof of identity or lawful authority, or trying to impose unauthorised fees.

But the report Taking Control, compiled by the charities, said that some bailiffs regularly intimidated debtors, failed to accept offers of payment and also failed to take account of whether a debtor was particularly vulnerable.

Citizens Advice chief executive, Gillian Guy, said: "Harsh tactics by bailiffs can cause severe distress and push people even further into debt.

"Local authorities have a key role to play in stamping out bad practices - by treating people in arrears fairly and ensuring bailiffs are only ever used as a last resort."

The use of bailiffs to enforce the recovery of debts is still widespread, with unpaid council tax being a particularly common reason.

Between 2014-15 councils in England and Wales asked bailiffs to pursue debts on 2.1 million occasions, the charities say

Wonga hacked

PAYDAY lender Wonga is warning customers that their personal data could have been stolen.

The company, which charges exorbitant interest rates up to 1,286%, has admitted that up to 250,000 accounts may have been hacked.

It alerted the authorities and started to contact borrowers to make them aware of the problem, and give details of a dedicated customer services phone line for those affected.

The message said that Wonga was working to establish the full details but data breached "may have included one or more of the following: name, email address, home address, phone number, the last four digits of your card number (but not the whole number) and/or your bank account number and sort code."

Mattress scam

THE Local Government Association - which represents most local authorities in England and Wales - said some "scam traders" were selling dirty mattresses that had been dumped.

Others were importing them without the proper safety certificates. The mattresses are then repackaged - often in branded wrapping.

Some sellers pretend a local hotel is selling them after ordering too many.

Simon Blackburn, the chairman of the LGA's safer and stronger communities board, said: "These fly-by-night sellers don't care about the risks these mattresses pose, they just want to make a quick buck and leave you with phoney details so they can't be traced.

"Anyone offered a cheap mattress on their doorstep should refuse."

Debt is soaring

HOUSEHOLD debt has risen to its highest level since just after the financial crash of 2008, official figures show.

Bank of England data shows personal debt grew 10.8% in the year to 30 November to £192.2bn in the UK - the highest level since December 2008.

Debt charity Step Change is calling on the government to adopt a scheme that gives problem debtors 12 months' breathing space to get back on track.

Farm gates stolen

FARMERS right across Britain have been warned to stay extra vigilant after a recent spate in the theft of farm gates.

The latest series of incidents involved farms in the Marshwood Vale area of Dorset.

Officers from Dorset Police's rural crime team said cattle hurdles and gates were stolen on three separate occasions in the area in the past few days.

A police spokesman said: "Please lock up all unused gates and hurdles, mark them with paint or weld the farm postcode on.

"Remove them from view of main roads and areas where the public have access."

Last month, police in Wales warned farmers to be on alert after eight 12ft-wide steel gates were stolen from farms in Pembrokeshire, Newport and Cardigan in Ceredigion.

A police spokesman said rural criminals planned many crimes in advance and he urged farmers and the public to be on the lookout for suspicious behaviour and vehicle movements.

"The loss of equipment, metal and livestock may not be noticed immediately, and its detection can often be difficult and it has an impact on people's livelihoods," he added.

Don't be fuelish

POLICE in Hertfordshire have issued a warning to petrol thieves, saying they are putting their lives at risk by drilling into petrol tanks.

There were four incidents recently where car fuel tanks were drilled into and fuel drained.

Neighbourhood inspector, Chris Hunt, said: "Drilling into tanks to steal fuel is extremely dangerous; one spark could cause an explosion leading to serious or even fatal injury.

"Although small amounts of petrol have been stolen, these incidents have caused huge inconvenience to the vehicle owners who have been left with hefty repair bills."

Tagging is a capital idea

"These tags will monitor the offenders who cause the most harm to communities and greatest expense to the justice system."



Met Commander Neil Jerome

By Peter Faulkner

EIGHT London boroughs are to share a £620,000 pot in a bid to keep track of their most prolific criminals.

Up to 100 of London's most prolific criminals are being fitted with satellite tagging technology to track their movements 24 hours a day.

And London mayor, Mr Sadiq Khan also announced an extra £620,000 over the next 18 months for his wider criminal justice programme in Camden, Enfield, Haringey, Islington, Hackney, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest to focus on serial offenders.

Mr Khan told the London Assembly: "These tags will monitor the offenders who cause the most harm to communities and greatest expense to the justice system, while also helping to detect whether someone was present at the scene of a crime and supporting victims by alerting probation officers if conditions are breached."

The scheme, the first of its kind in the country, will help drive down re-offending rates as police or probation officers will be alerted if individuals break a court order or bail conditions.

Magistrates in all eight London boroughs have been given the power to order the wearing of GPS tags as part of a community or suspended sentence.

The pilot scheme ensures offenders abide by conditions such as a sex offender not going near a

school, or a gang member staying out of rivals' territory.

The original system using existing tags only confirms if someone is at a designated address during a curfew period. But now the authorities will know if tagged suspects who do re-offend were at a crime scene.

Data from the GPS tags is captured continuously and looked at when required. The first one was fitted on Monday. Young adults and female offenders will be a priority. They will be monitored 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and face a potential prison sentence if they breach the terms of their court order.

Adult re-offending costs the capital £2.25 billion a year, with 82 per cent of London's 4,000 most prolific offenders estimated to commit new crimes. The overall rate is 24 per cent. The £150,000 pilot, funded by a Home Office grant, was first proposed by Mayor Boris Johnson but has been delivered by his successor Sadiq Khan, who has made tackling re-offending a priority.

Metropolitan Police Commander Neil Jerome said: "Tackling those offenders who cause the most harm is a key priority for keeping London safe.

"We know there are a small number of offenders who repeatedly commit offences... this initiative will play an important part in reducing offending and preventing people falling victim to crime."



Bank staff are being trained to spot potential fraud victims

Banking on success

Police are hoping the scheme will help reduce financial crime by spotting scams before money has been handed over.

By Staff Reporter

BANK staff across the country are to be given training in how to spot whether a customer is withdrawing cash to pay a rogue trader.

Police hope the scheme will help reduce financial crime by spotting scams before money has been handed over.

The plan is to train every single front-facing employee of banks, building societies and Post Offices.

The scheme is being extended nationwide with the first 16 police forces trained in the new protocol by the end of June.

Cash payments to fraudsters are typically much harder to trace than online payments with the vast majority of cases going unsolved.

Typical frauds of this kind include paying rogue builders, romance scams and elderly abuse. Staff at one bank which has trialled the scheme helped stop a customer being swindled out of £13,000.

Ray, who is in his 60s, was approached by a builder at his home about some work on his house. He had withdrawn £6,000 from his local branch after explaining to staff what it was going to be used for.

But when he returned a week later to take out another £13,000 he was recognised by staff member Ann-Marie.

She asked him questions about his cash withdrawal which raised suspicions. Ray handed over the flier he had been given with the builder's

contact details and staff gave him a call.

Ann-Marie said: "The person that answered wasn't very professional and the alarm bells started to ring. Plus the amount he [Ray] wanted to cash and the work he needed done just didn't add up."

Staff contacted the police who visited Ray the next day when the builder was at his property.

Officers did a background check on the builder and which uncovered suspicious activity and he was arrested.

The new scheme, known as the Banking Protocol, is aimed at ensuring banks and police are more active in protecting customers.

It is being run as a joint venture between the police, Financial Fraud Action - which represents banks - and Trading Standards.

All customer-facing bank staff will be told to look out for specific signs that a client may be the victim of ongoing fraud.

If they have suspicions, they are encouraged to call the police and give a special password.

Police trained under the protocol will also commit to investigating the fraud as a priority - often visiting the bank branch, or the customer's home, immediately.

In some cases, they may be able to catch the criminal waiting outside the bank or the victim's home to collect the cash.

Banks say £1.4m has already been stopped from leaving customer accounts.

Held to ransom

MORE than 4,000 Brits have had their computers infected with ransomware this year, with over £4.5m paid out to cyber criminals, according to Action Fraud.

Ransomware is a type of malware that encrypts files of infected PCs before demanding an extortionate payment for the encryption key needed to recover data.

The malware typically arrives in the form of malicious email attachments prospective marks are encouraged to open or through exploit kits that exploit software vulnerabilities to push malware onto the PCs of visiting surfers.

Representatives of the UK's national fraud and cyber reporting centre told the BBC that it was fighting the growing scam by both working with the antivirus industry and by taking down the domains, servers and networks of cybercriminals.

A recent multi-country study by Malwarebytes, the security software firm, found that nearly 40 per cent of businesses had experienced a ransomware attack in the previous year.

Of these victims, more than a third had lost revenue and 20 per cent said they had to stop business completely.

Care home crook

ANNE Dobson stole more than £201,000 from a care home where she worked - but she said can only pay back just £34,000

Dobson, of Cressing Road, Witham, was convicted of stealing cash from the Broomfield Grange care home in Chelmsford, where she worked as an administrator.

She siphoned off fees paid by residents by telling head office they would be getting less than the figure agreed between the care home manager and residents.

She gave residents her bank account details and took full payment of £1,200, but only paid Embrace Group £800.

However, a Proceeds of Crime hearing at Chelmsford Crown Court heard how Dobson only has £34,065 in assets.

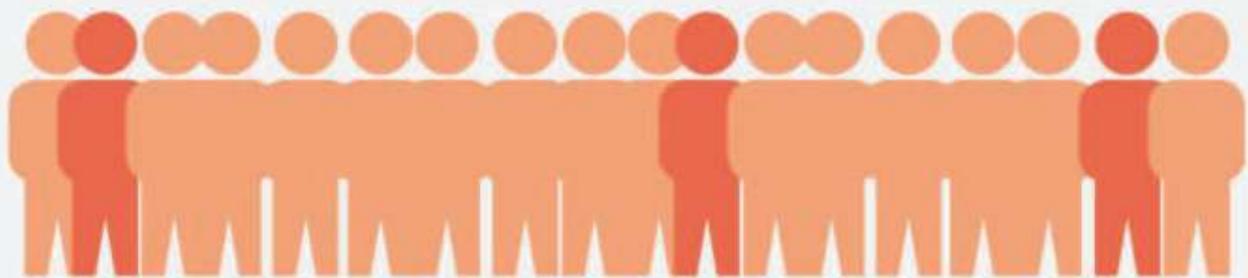
Recorder Giles Eyre gave her three months to pay back £34,065 in compensation.

If she fails to pay the full amount within the time given, she faces a further nine-month jail term.

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So when you're thinking about choosing your next tradesperson, take the guess work out of your decision and don't be the victim of a rogue trade.



This is the porn star whose image is being used to blackmail men

Porn star used as bait

Sexy images were used by criminals in Morocco to get British men to perform lewd acts on camera then they were blackmailed.

By Peter Faulkner

IMAGES of Colombian porn star Dayana Perez Sosa are being used to encourage British men to perform indecent acts on camera before being blackmailed.

Perez Sosa knew nothing about her sexy images being used worldwide until it was revealed by the Sun newspaper.

The newspaper found that up to 3,000 people in one Moroccan town are earning money by duping men into performing rude acts on camera and then blackmailing them, it has emerged.

Oued Zem, 100 miles south east of Casablanca, has been dubbed the sextortion capital of the world with criminals increasingly targeting British men.

Victims are duped into performing sex acts on webcam before blackmailers threaten to send the video to their friends and family on social media.

They are then paying up to 10,000 dirham (£800) in return for the clip to be destroyed, according to an interview with Oued Zem who was involved in the scam for two years before being jailed.

Hamzer Danjer told him his team of four used images of Colombian porn star Dayana Perez Sosa - without her knowledge - as part of a sophisticated method of luring victims and that

'just about every man would fall for it'.

The Sun reported that Morocco has detained more than 350 people in a crackdown on the industry - with most of the arrested being made in Oued Zem, a town of 90,000.

The country is also said to have set up a series of designated cyber crime units in a bid to destroy the illegal industry.

According to National Crime Agency Statistics, the number of Britons reporting cases of sextortion has rocketed by nearly a thousand from 385 in 2015 to 1,245 in 2016.

Experts suspect thousands more have fallen prey to the gangs without contacting the authorities about their plight.

On its advice page, the agency urges victims to call police, not to communicate with or pay blackmailers and to preserve evidence such as their Skype ID.

Criminals were said to be using 'honey traps' to entice affluent businessmen and promising young male students to commit compromising acts on webcams.

The gangs were making millions in ransom payments by threatening to share the footage with family, friends and colleagues. Officers from the NCA warned that Britain was being targeted by gangs in Morocco, the Philippines and the Ivory Coast.

Fraud will cost us

BRITAIN is facing a £1.7billion fine from the EU for allowing criminal gangs to flood European black markets with illegal Chinese goods in a move that will add to tensions surrounding Brexit negotiations.

The European anti-fraud office, known as Olaf, has accused British customs officials failing crack down on gangs using fake invoices to make false claims about the value of shoes and goods.

It claimed that France, Germany, Spain and Italy have lost a combined £2.7billion in VAT revenues because of the failures of British customs officials.

Downing Street said that it "does not recognise" the figures, which is described as an estimate rather than a bill, and said that the UK takes all allegations of fraud "seriously"

Boris's mum duped

BORIS Johnson's mother was conned by two men who claimed to be antiques-buyers and came into her home and took a precious Faberge-style egg.

Charlotte Johnson Wahl, 74, contacted the men after spotting adverts in The Lady magazine offering cash in exchange for old broken clocks and watches.

But once inside her home they took a miniature Faberge-style egg, a precious family item which has been in the family for a number of generations.

Rachel Johnson, the foreign secretary's sister, described the incident in her weekly newspaper column, and revealed she heard the news after police officers interviewed her mother for two hours last week.

Ms Johnson said she was amazed at the diligence of the officers and the men were arrested soon after and admitted being involved in several other incidents.

The egg, handed down by a family member, will be returned after the court case.

CONTACT US

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'Help me find my missing sister'

BARBARA McGeachy would have celebrated her 79th birthday on April 12 and her brother and nephew had hoped to share it with her.

But Barbara cannot be found. She disappeared more than two decades ago and now police have started investigating her disappearance again.

Brother Jim Dixon, 86, and her nephew Tim Dixon, 56, joined police in launching an appeal for for new information which may lead to a breakthrough in the search.

Barbara, a then 55-year-old housewife who lived in Trinity Road, Rayleigh, was reported missing in April 1994.

In the years that have passed, her family have heard nothing from her, nor had any information which has successfully led to answers about her whereabouts.

Her brother and nephew are making a direct appeal for anyone with information which may be connected to her disappearance, to come forward.

Tim Dixon, who lives in Cold Norton, and is a retired Essex Police officer, said: "Our family have been living with this for decades. Barbara has missed so many family events and milestones, including my wedding and the birth of my children.

"We just want to know whether she is alive, and if not, what happened to her. We ask that anyone, specifically people who lived near the Trinity Road area during the time of my Aunt Barbara's disappearance, and who think they may have relevant information, to contact police.

"Even the tiniest piece of information

could lead to a breakthrough."

DI Granger, who is leading the review of Barbara's case, said: "Essex Police has explored numerous lines of enquiry in this missing person case since the mid-nineties, including a number of reviews.

"We are working closely with Barbara's family to identify new information, however our investigative opportunities are gradually becoming fewer.

"I want to hear from anyone who has even the smallest piece of information, or anecdote to share, which they feel could be useful in the search for Barbara."

Anyone with information is asked to call DI Anna Granger at Basildon Police Station on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111 or via www.crimestoppers-uk.org.

Gym boss and the policeman set up a drug dealing empire

By Peter Faulkner

A POLICE inspector faces being kicked out of the force in disgrace after he turned to drug dealing to make more money.

Darren Lewis, 50, an inspector attached to the Metropolitan Police Territorial Support Group, became pals with Essex gym owner Nicholas Boys, 31, and it was to lead to his downfall as a policeman.

The two of them conspired to sell steroids unaware that someone had tipped off the police who started to take an interest in their activities.

And their dodgy business ended when they appeared at Southwark Crown Court and were both sentenced to three and a half years in prison.

Lewis was investigated by the Met's Directorate of Professional Standards in 2013 following information that the pair were were involved in the illegal supply of anabolic steroids.

Officers found that both Lewis and Boys, from Walton Road, Southend, appeared to have independent access to the garage at Lewis's home address.

On September 9 that year, when both men were at the garage, officers carried out a raid and the men were arrested.

Police found found filing cabinets and hold-alls containing a quantity of illegal steroids, prescription drugs, drug paraphernalia, a



steroid production kit and raw materials to produce steroids.

Searches of Boys' and Lewis's homes uncovered a number of items including phones and computers which provided evidence of their long standing friendship and their activity.

Lewis was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to supply class C drugs, one count of conspiracy to produce class C drugs and one

count of converting criminal property to the value of £66,000.

Boys was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to supply class C drugs and one count of conspiracy to produce class C drugs. Boys was previously jailed over a steroid-selling business in 2012.

A Met Police spokesman said misconduct proceedings will commence "in due course".