



COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS

Even in a period of national and international crisis, such as during the current pandemic, **fraudsters will take advantage of these unprecedented times to target vulnerable individuals**, and also exploit any means to obtain financial or other gains.

REMAIN ALERT AND VIGILANT...

particularly to requests for your bank account details or personal data.

The council is receiving a large volume of requests for assistance. Some of these will not be genuine and will be from individuals or organised crime gangs trying to make money or obtain services for criminal purposes. If you apply to the council for financial assistance – for example for a payment from the retail and small businesses fund don't be alarmed or offended if you are asked to provide additional information to prove you are eligible.

The council has a duty to protect the public purse and ensure all government grants and funding is paid to legitimate applicants.

FRAUD ALERT

These are examples of some of the current scams that have been reported and relate specifically to fraudsters exploiting the Coronavirus pandemic:-

The following are circulating on social media, by email or text message:

- **Free school meal scam** - a scam is operating which is targeting parents in schools. We have been alerted by the DFE that some parents have received an email stating:
"As schools will be closing, if you're entitled to free school meals, please send your bank details and we'll make sure you're supported".
- **Text entitled 'GOV.UK CORONAVIRUS ALERT'** – this states that an individual has been recorded as leaving home on three occasions and has therefore been fined £35. The individual is signposted to a link to find more information.

- **Online shopping scams** – placing orders for PPE/hand sanitiser etc. that never gets delivered.

Fraudsters are targeting people in their homes as a ploy to gain entry to steal property or to extort personal information such as bank account or general financial details:

- **Bogus officials** offering COVID-19 home testing.
- **Bogus police officers** stating they were investigating coronavirus related matters.
- **Bogus volunteers** offering to help with shopping or other daily tasks.

There are a number of genuine community-led organisations which have been set-up across the local area to help those people who are self-isolating, vulnerable or struggling to cope due to the lockdown and restrictions in place. These organisations will not ask for money in advance, they will only offer assistance in response to a request from you for help. They will not knock on your door unsolicited. All legitimate organisations will be happy to give alternative ways you can verify they are genuine. They will not ask you to provide your bank account details to them. If a voluntary organisation is helping you with shopping they will advise you when they will be delivering, how they will expect payment and that they will observe the social distancing rules when at your property.



Cyber criminals are also creating fake websites to extort money and personal information

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ADVICE TO STOP FRAUD

1. **Check that the message makes sense** - watch out for bad grammar or spelling errors; does what you're being asked sound right?
2. **Always confirm a message is genuine** by calling the person / organisation - look up the contact information from a different place or source.
3. **Never click on any link** in an email or message if you do not know the sender or unless you are 100% sure.
4. **Stop and think** before engaging in any correspondence - don't be rushed or pressured into responding.
5. **Only use official sources** for information around coronavirus.

- **More information** can be obtained from the National Cyber Security Centre at www.ncsc.gov.uk
- **Help and advice** can also be found at Gloucestershire's Community Help Hub at:

www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/gloucestershires-community-help-hub

- If you suspect you have been the target or victim of a scam you can **report it to Action Fraud** at www.actionfraud.police.uk or call 0300 123 2040

You can also report any matters to the council's Counter Fraud Unit, who work on behalf of councils across Gloucestershire and West Oxfordshire.

- You can email in confidence at fraud.referrals@cotswold.gov.uk

Wash your hands of coronavirus scams!

Friends Against Scams aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams.

Be aware of people offering or selling:

- Virus testing kits - these are only offered by NHS.
- Vaccines or miracle cures - there is currently no vaccine or cure.
- Overpriced or fake goods to protect yourself from coronavirus such as anti-bacterial products.
- Shopping or medication collection services.
- Home cleaning services.

Protect yourself and others:

- Don't be rushed into making a decision. If it sounds too good to be true it probably is.
- Only purchase goods from legitimate retailers and take a moment to think before parting with money or personal information.
- Don't assume everyone is genuine. It's okay to reject, refuse or ignore any requests. Only criminals will try to rush or panic you.
- If someone claims to represent a charity, ask them for ID. Be suspicious of requests for money up front. If someone attempts to pressurise you into accepting a service they are unlikely to be genuine. Check with family and friends before accepting offers of help if you are unsure.

Be a good friend,
help to protect
your family, friends
and neighbours
from scams.

**Read it.
Share it.
Prevent it.**

#Coronavirus
#ScamAware



TO STOP FRAUD

Contact
For advice on scams call the
Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 11 33
To report a scam call Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040
Contact your bank if you think you have been scammed.

**NATIONAL
TRADING
STANDARDS**

Scams Team

To learn more about the different types of scams visit www.FriendsAgainstScams.org.uk

