



## Mass marketing scams

### Overview

To understand behaviours of mass marketing scam and doorstep crime victims and identify effective methods to deter future victimisation.

- A scam is a term used to describe any fraudulent behaviour, business or scheme that takes money, personal details or other goods from an unsuspecting individual.
- Plymouth City Council Trading Standards are part of the National Trading Standards Team (NTSST), a multiagency organisation tasked with identifying and preventing scam/doorstep victims from responding to the companies involved.
- The NTSST have identified over 700 victims within the Plymouth area from various sources such as 'suckers lists' and mail which has been intercepted from partner organisations. We are visiting these victims in an attempt to stop them sending money and to offer support.
- The letters received by the victims are very convincing, telling them they are certain winners. Others are very intimidating, using threats from so-called clairvoyants or spiritualists to extort money.
- Since August 2014 over 225 of these victims have been visited. When visiting the victims there were various responses ranging from refusing to engage to identifying people who spend considerable time and resources on trying to win fictitious prize draws.
- So far, the amount of money identified as being sent to scammers from victims who have told us they have sent money is £550 000.00. However, this is a very conservative figure as most people were reluctant to discuss this matter with the officer.
- When speaking to victims about their experiences the details are very similar. One of the common factors in starting this behaviour appears to be memory loss or dementia, although this is a non-qualified observation based on the victim volunteering this information. Many of these people are vulnerable and appear susceptible to financial abuse.

- Some residents needed further visits and support after the initial meeting to reinforce the message they were not going to receive any winnings. However, given the time involved to monitor each scam victim it is difficult to measure the success of these visits.
- The potential impact on this financial exploitation cannot be measured in financial terms alone. None of the people who have been asked saw themselves as victims of crime. However, the impact of responding can have a detrimental effect on a victims health including mental health issues, increased social isolation and poor diet.
- Research could be undertaken to identify the reasons that people fall victim to the scams and why they find it so difficult to stop sending money. This research will enable us to understand the behavioural patterns of these victims and as a result of that information be able to more successfully deter future victimisation.

Contact [Alex Fry](#) for further information.