



Latest news from Redcar & Cleveland Council's STOP COLD CALLING TEAM



DARLINGTON ROOFER PROSECUTED FOR UNFAIR TRADING PRACTICES

A roofer has received a fine and been ordered to pay compensation after carrying out substandard and unnecessary roofing work at the home of a Redcar & Cleveland resident.

Thomas Smith, sole director of Everest Property Improvements Ltd, was prosecuted by Redcar & Cleveland Borough Council after an investigation by the Council's Trading Standards Service.

Smith advertised roofing services through a website and leaflet drops to homes. He was contracted to carry out work to the roofline of a property at an agreed price after leafleting a consumer. After dismantling the roofline he advised the homeowner that additional work was required because roof batons and felt were rotten.

An independent expert found the work to be substandard and the additional work unnecessary.

In September at Teesside Magistrates Court Smith pleaded guilty to two unfair trading practices under the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008.

He received a fine of £1250 reduced to £833

to reflect the guilty plea and ordered to pay compensation of £7344.

TIPS ON FINDING A REPUTABLE TRADER

Do some background checks

If it is a limited company:

Look on Companies House website to see how long they have been trading and find the registered office address.

Are there any warning signs such as overdue accounts or multiple directors involved over a short period of time or directors who have been company officers of other companies providing the same type of services which have ceased to trade?

Does the company have a website? Are full company details disclosed on the website and is there a physical address, a business email and other contact details?

If it is not a limited company:

Check the address - use an online mapping service to see what the address corresponds to or check the address on Royal Mail's online postcode finder.

Do online research for information about the

NOT WELCOME



trader.

If the business claims to be a member of a trade association check directly with the trade association. Find out what membership requires of the business and what benefits it provides for the consumer. Is there a dispute resolution process in the event of a complaint? Is there an insurance backed guarantee if the business ceases to trade?

Check that you have full business details

For a sole trader or partnership get the trading name, the name of the proprietor or partners, contact telephone number/email and a full geographical address.

For a limited company get the registered name, trading name, telephone number/email and a full geographical address.

Get a written contract with

A detailed description of the work.

A payment schedule where you do not have to pay up front or for materials that are yet to be delivered.

The date the work will start and finish.

The business's complaints procedure.

Who is responsible for planning permission and building approval where applicable.

Who is responsible for removal and disposal of waste – get waste carriers license.

Visit www.trustmark.org.uk a government endorsed scheme

The website provides a tool which you can use to search for tradespersons



TOP 3 FRAUDS IN REDCAR & CLEVELAND

The most common frauds which take place in Redcar and Cleveland:



ROMANCE
FRAUD



EMPLOYMENT
FRAUD



INVESTMENT
FRAUD

In our June newsletter we highlighted Romance and Employment Fraud. In this issue we are turning our attention to Investment Fraud.

In August 2025 three people were convicted of fraudulent trading relating to a wine fraud investigated by Hertfordshire Trading Standards Service.

In the ten years that Imperial Wine & Spirits Merchant Ltd, previously Imperial Wines of London Ltd, traded 41 victims lost £6million. Over £37million passed through the company accounts.

The company said that they would not make any money until they sold the wine at a profit for the customer. However, the initial price was marked up so high, sometimes over 400%, that it would never increase in value over that price. The majority of wine did exist but customers lost hundreds of thousands of pounds and some have no wine at all.

The company presented itself as a well-respected company having offices in London, Paris and Hong Kong and personal suppliers in vineyards and chateaux in France. Glossy brochures were produced and sent out. In reality the company operated from a call centre using young people working from scripts to cold call elderly and vulnerable elderly people. Consumers, often lonely or recently bereaved were lied to and manipulated. The company used luxury taxis and wined and dined their victims.

In October, Benjamin Cazaly, Dominic D'Sa, and Gregory Assemakis, all from London, were given prison terms by a judge at St Albans Crown Court. All three had pleaded not guilty.

Cazaly, 43, was jailed for six and a half years; Dominic D'Sa, 46, for four and a half years; and Gregory Assemakis, 40, for three and a half years.



D'Sa had a previous conviction for fraud.

Not only have the victims suffered financial loss the fraud has left a huge emotional impact upon them and their families. The tentacles of this fraud even reached Redcar & Cleveland.



There are many different types of investment fraud: **Art; Gold; Crypto currency; Shares; Bonds; Diamonds; Land; Wine; and Whisky.**

They usually start with a cold call - telephone, letter, email, Facebook pop up.

What they offer may not exist or may be worthless

They don't want to take no for an answer and will pressure you into making a rushed decision with no time to consider the nature of the investment. They can be extremely convincing. They may send brochures displaying logos and certificates to impress you or direct you to a professional looking website.

Increasingly fake advertisements are being created in which celebrities appear promoting an investment opportunity. The celebrity has nothing to do with it. The fraudsters are using AI generated deepfake technology where the celebrity appears to be in an interview setting telling you about the investments they have made.

Action Fraud offer the following advice on protecting yourself from Financial Investment fraud:

Investment opportunities: Don't be rushed into making an investment. Remember, legitimate organisations will never pressure you into investing on the spot.

Seek advice first: Before making significant financial decisions, speak with trusted friends or family members, or seek professional independent advice.

FCA register: Use the [Financial Conduct Authority's \(FCA\) register](#) to check if the company is regulated by the FCA. If you deal with a firm (or individual) that isn't regulated, you may not be covered by the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) if things go wrong and you lose your money.

For more information about how to invest safely, please visit: <https://www.fca.org.uk/scamsmart>

REIMBURSEMENT FOR FRAUD VICTIMS



The Financial Fraud Advocacy service continues to reclaim money for fraud victims from financial institutions.

The Service, delivered by Safer Communities and funded by Cleveland Police & Crime Commissioner and the four trading standards services covering the Cleveland police force area, has advocated on behalf of a number of victims in the Redcar and Cleveland area.

From January to October 2025 the Financial Fraud Advocates have recovered £264,889.05 for vulnerable victims of fraud in Redcar & Cleveland with cases awaiting a decision from the Financial Ombudsman valued at £94,700.

Across the Cleveland area £613,539.77 had been recovered by mid-November 2025.

The advocates have also had success in claiming reimbursement for victims of rogue traders.

The Service is greatly appreciated by those it helps, as one victim recently highlighted:

"I lost nearly £1000 to a Paypal scam. After the conversation with Vicky, in less than 24hrs the issues were resolved. I can't thank her enough. I tried independently for 8 months being passed from pillar to post and getting nowhere. With the help of Vicky, this has ended my nightmare".

(78-year-old victim, full reimbursement.)



Scammers will always take advantage of current events to scam you. Be alert!

Defective Wall Insulation installed under two government energy efficiency schemes

According to the National Audit Office 98% of homes which had external wall insulation installed under the ECO4 and Great British Insulation Scheme have issues which will lead to damp and mould if remedial work is not carried out.

Fraudsters will take advantage of this situation so be aware of scammers pretending to come from Ofgem or Trustmark and advising that payment is required for remedial work.

DCA Car Finance Claims

Compensation for consumers who had Discretionary Commission Agreements on their vehicles between 2007 and 2024 and which were not properly disclosed are likely to receive payouts in 2026.

The Financial Conduct Authority estimates that compensation payments will be around £700.00 on average per agreement.

Fraudsters are already contacting people pretending to be car finance companies asking for personal and financial information and falsely claiming that they are owed compensation.

You do not need a third party to help you claim compensation.

There is a free car finance reclaim tool and guide on Martin Lewis's Money Saving Expert website: www.moneysavingexpert.com

BE VIGILANT!



The Moped 'Crash for Cash' insurance scam

This scam, prevalent in London, is spreading across the UK

It involves a moped driver deliberately driving into your vehicle at low speed causing little or no damage. They will accuse you of being at fault and take photos of your vehicle including the number plate. They will ask for your driver's licence or insurance paperwork and photograph those as well. They will then take out fraudulent insurance policies or make false claims on your policy.

After an accident you are only required to exchange names, addresses and vehicle registration details.

If targeted in a suspected crash for cash scam, you should tell your insurer and contact your local police force.

Evidence can be reported to Insurance Fraud Bureau's confidential CheatLine service via an [online form](#), or phoneline (powered by CrimeStoppers) at 0800 422 0421.

Copycat Websites – Imitating Official Government Websites

Whether it's doing a Land Registry check, renewing your passport or your car tax there is a risk that you may fall foul of a website that looks like an official provider of services but in fact is designed to get you to part with your money unnecessarily by charging for a service that is provided cheaper or free of charge by official government channels.

You also put your personal information at risk by using these websites.

Instead of searching for the services you need via a search engine, go to [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) and use the search function there. Then you'll know you're on the official site.

The National Trading Standards E-crime team take action to disrupt these websites and will prosecute those responsible when appropriate.

To protect yourself:

- Use www.gov.uk. It's the easiest and most secure place to find government services and information online.
- Instead of searching for the services you need via a search engine, go to www.gov.uk directly and use the search function there. Then you know you're on the official site.
- If you do use a search engine, look out for the differences between natural search results and paid-for search results that may appear at the top

To report a misleading or copycat website, you can call the Citizens Advice consumer service on 0808 223 1133 or use the online form at: [Contact the consumer service - Citizens Advice](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/report-a-misleading-or-copycat-website/)

QR CODE FRAUD

This type of fraud is on the rise as we increasingly use QR codes as a quick and easy way to make payments and access information.

According to figures from Action Fraud almost £3.5 million was lost between April 2024 and April 2025.

Action Fraud report that most QR code related fraud takes place in open spaces.

Action Fraud recommends that to use QR codes safely in outdoor spaces such as car parks and stations you should check for tampered QR codes (stickers). If in doubt use a search engine to find the official website or app of the organisation you need to make payment to.

Use the QR code scanner that comes with your phone rather than an App that is downloaded from an App store.

<https://stopthinkfraud.campaign.gov.uk>

Have Yourself A Scam Free Merry Christmas



Watch out for:

Fake versions of legitimate websites

Fake websites are designed to steal personal and financial information or to take payment for goods that don't exist.

It can be difficult to tell if a website is genuine or not.

What to look for:

- A website address (or URL) which doesn't look quite right, e.g. references a well-known brand name or has a slight variation or a spelling mistake.
- The padlock symbol or <https://> is missing in the URL which means your payments could be intercepted.
- Low prices on high value items.
- Payment requested by bank transfer without the option of credit card, debit card or third party payment provider such as Paypal.
- Very little company information provided.
- A lack of information about Returns and other policies.
- Poor quality presentation/grammar and spelling.

Get Safe Online has partnered with Cifas, the UK's leading fraud prevention service, to launch 'Check-a-Website'. Hosted on www.getsafeonline.org it invites users to check if a website is safe to use before accessing.



Delivery scams

The most common delivery scam is where you get a notification by text or email that a parcel couldn't be delivered and a small fee or additional details are needed to complete delivery.

The fraudster pretends to be from Royal Mail or another delivery company. When you click on a link in the message you are taken to what appears to be a genuine website where you are asked for personal and financial information. These details are then used to commit fraud.

Remember not to respond immediately. Be cautious of a message that starts with the name of the delivery company, prompts you to follow a link and urges that you take action. Are you expecting a delivery from the company named? Contact the courier direct using details on their website.

Ticket fraud

Criminals use websites and social media to sell tickets that are fake or don't exist. Primarily they will target high demand events where tickets are sold out.

Websites are clones of legitimate sites with subtle differences in the website address. On social media fraudsters will create fake profiles and post advertisements or message direct to arrange a sale.

Action Fraud reporting shows £9.7million was lost to ticket fraud in 2024.

The Society of Ticket Agents and Retailers www.star.org.uk offers advice on how to identify ticket fraud on social media and what you can do if you come across it.

Loan Fee Scams

Fraudsters always take advantage of increased financial pressure at Christmas.

Loan fee fraud happens when a fraudster asks for a fee for a loan.

The loan is never provided and once the fee is paid the fraudster disappears so you are left out of pocket and they have your financial and personal information.

Only deal with authorised firms. If you don't you won't be protected if things go wrong and you could end up losing money.



The Financial Conduct Authority offers the following advice:

- Use the [FCA Firm Checker](#) to make sure a financial firm is authorised by the FCA and has permission to provide the service you're looking for.
- Check that the firm's contact details match the details on the Firm Checker.
- Always use the contact details on the Firm Checker, rather than a direct line or email you've been given.
- If there are no contact details on the Firm Checker, or the firm says they are out of date, call us on 0800 111 6768.

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TRADING STANDARDS NEWS

DANGEROUS LABUBU DOLLS



Over 1500 counterfeit and unsafe Labubu dolls have been removed from sale in Redcar & Cleveland. The dolls were found on sale across the borough in retail outlets and offered as prizes in amusement arcades.

Advertised by influencers and high profile celebrities the dolls are the latest must have accessory. High demand has inevitably led to mass produced fakes. Counterfeit goods are often of poor quality, non-compliant and unsafe.

Labubu dolls seized by trading standards were found to pose a risk to consumers. Hazards included choking risks from detachable small parts, easy access to button batteries (where present in certain models) and exposure to toxic chemicals.



Advice:

Genuine products generally come with intact packaging displaying embossed lettering and a holographic QR code which should link to a genuine website. If the bag and box are separated the product is most likely counterfeit.

Poor quality products are usually counterfeit. (Misshapen features and easily detachable parts.)

Labubu dolls with heavy stitching marks on the forehead seam are usually counterfeit.

Labubu dolls without the Pop Mart logo, (on the dolls, this is usually found on the sole of the foot), are usually counterfeit.

Items such as pencils, fans, and notebooks are generally fake.

If the Labubu doll is not marked with a CE or UKCA mark and a UK importer's address it is non-compliant and likely to be counterfeit.

UNDER-AGE SALES

Trading standards officers in partnership with Cleveland Police conducted an underage sales test purchase operation across the borough over two days in October.

The visits to premises, using underage volunteers, targeted vapes, alcohol, and fireworks.

The operation resulted in one sale of alcohol to a minor.

Enforcement action is under way.

ENERGY DRINKS – PROPOSAL TO BAN SALES TO U16s

The government has announced plans to ban the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children under the age of 16 years.

Evidence suggests that consumption of these drinks is linked to poor learning outcomes in school and as having an adverse effect on physical and mental health.

Some drinks also have high levels of sugar which is linked to obesity and dental decay.

Many supermarkets and larger retailers already have a voluntary ban in place but many businesses continue to sell these drinks to children.

For more information visit GOV.UK – Banning the sale of high-caffeine energy drinks to children.



Dementia Friends Sessions: Support for Carers and Families in Redcar & Cleveland



Dementia Action Teesside, the local charity leading the Dementia Friendly Redcar & Cleveland initiative, is inviting carers and relatives of people living with dementia to join their regular Dementia Friends sessions held at Reed Marsh House (Older Persons Mental Health Team), Coatham Road, Redcar.

These friendly and informative sessions—developed with the Alzheimer's Society—last around 1.5 hours and are designed specifically for those supporting someone with dementia. They provide practical guidance, emotional reassurance, and essential information that can make everyday life safer and less stressful. Carers often say that understanding the condition better, learning what support is available, and meeting others in similar situations helps reduce isolation and builds confidence when navigating day-to-day challenges.

Each session includes information about local support services, the Herbert Protocol (a vital tool that helps emergency services locate someone with dementia if they go missing), and John's Campaign, which champions the role of family carers in care settings. These resources are invaluable to families and can make a meaningful difference in helping keep loved ones safe and supported.

Upcoming Dementia Friends Sessions (all at 1pm):

- 23rd January
- 20th March

If you are interested in attending one of these sessions, you can book a place by calling Reed Marsh House on 01642 777400.

If you have any questions, feel free to email Dementia Action Teesside at info@dementiaactionteesside.org

To learn more about Dementia Action Teesside, visit their Facebook page or their website at: <https://dementiaactionteesside.org/index.php>

Dementia Information Sessions

Free interactive dementia information session at Reed Marsh House, Redcar TS10 1SR
TO BOOK Tel 01642 777400

SESSIONS ARE APPROX AN HOUR LONG AND HELD ON THE FOLLOWING DATES

23rd January or 20th March

START TIME: 1pm

SCAN ME

Scan to access Dementia Action Teesside's website

Redcar & Cleveland Trading Standards offers landline call blockers free of charge to individuals within the borough who are living with dementia.

These devices block scam and nuisance calls and can reduce stress and anxiety.

For further information email tradingstandards@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk or call 01287 612489.



healthwatch
Redcar and Cleveland

Health and Wellbeing Event

Date: Thursday 4 December 2025

Time: 11:00 am – 13:00 pm

Location: Grangetown Generations Centre & Library

There will be a variety of services that offer advice on all aspects of your health and wellbeing including: housing, employability, healthy heart checks, energy advice plus much more!

Free refreshments and Santa Clause



Everyone who comes will be given a free raffle ticket for the opportunity to win a brand new airfryer or heater





**DO YOU
REALLY KNOW
WHO YOU'RE
TALKING TO?**

ROMANCE FRAUD IS ON THE RISE