

Warning about scam messages targeting older people

Police are urging members of the public to talk to older family members following a rise in phishing text, phone call and WhatsApp messages.

The scams involve usually a WhatsApp message, but sometimes a text or phone call, from a person claiming to be a family member, and have the common aim of encouraging the recipient to transfer money.

The renewed warning comes after numerous new reports received from victims across all districts in Northern Ireland. While anyone can fall victim to scams, police are seeing this type of scam targeting older people in particular.

Superintendent Gerard Pollock, Chair of the ScamwiseNI Partnership, said: “We are noticing more and more reports in recent months of this type of scam from individuals across Northern Ireland.

“In each case, a person purporting to be a family member, often a daughter or son, asks for money. Typically, the ‘child’ is short of money or late paying bills, and asks the recipient to transfer money into an account. This is backed by a story that he or she has recently changed their phone or phone number.

“It’s a despicable act, which takes advantage of a person’s willingness to help out loved ones who are perhaps away from home.

“In some of these cases, the victim has been careful enough to check with the relative and therefore realise it’s a scam before departing with any money. Sadly, however, this isn’t always the case. Just last week, one victim lost £6,000 after receiving one of these messages.

“It’s really important that if you have older members of your family, talk with them and warn them about this particular type of scam. This is a really important conversation to have.”

Superintendent Pollock continued: “Fraudsters will try anything to trick people. Scams may come in all shapes and sizes, but they have one thing in common – scammers rely upon the good faith and vulnerability of those they target. Hard-earned savings can easily be gone in a flash and, with it, one’s confidence.

“Please don’t get caught out. If you get a message make contact with your son or daughter on their usual number. Don’t get into a text or WhatsApp conversation with the scammers. Spot it. Stop it.”

For further advice and information visit www.nidirect.gov.uk/scamwiseni or the ScamwiseNI Facebook page @scamwiseni. If you have any concerns about unsolicited calls, emails or letters then please report it to Action Fraud via their website – www.actionfraud.police.uk – or by phoning 0300 123 2040. You can also call police on the non-emergency number 101.

If you receive a suspicious message, whether by email, website or text message you can take the following actions:

- Email – if you feel unsure about an email you have received, you can forward it to the Suspicious Email Reporting Service at report@phishing.gov.uk
- Website – If you have come across a website which you think is fake, you can report it on the National Cyber Security Centre website: www.ncsc.gov.uk/report-scam-website
- Text message – Report suspicious text messages for free to **7726**. Your provider can investigate the text and take action if found to be fraudulent.

The ScamwiseNI Partnership works together to keep people across Northern Ireland safe from the risk of scams. Partners include over 30 law enforcement, statutory, charity, commercial and voluntary organisations as well as government departments.