

*All the cases included in this edition were successfully brought to a conclusion in 2016*

## Rogue builders sent to jail

Two men who tricked their victims into handing over thousands of pounds for unnecessary, poor quality or overpriced home repairs have been jailed. Our investigation found that Sean Lowther and James Delaney called at a number of homes in the county over a 12 month period, telling residents work needed to be carried out on their property.



The victims would agree a price and hand over an initial sum of money. The two men would then carry out some work, often increasing the cost to the homeowner or leaving the job unfinished. Surveyors later confirmed that the work carried out – including roof repairs and block paving –

was to such a poor standard it had little or no value. Victims lost between £560 and £6,000, and one victim was even taken to a cashpoint by Lowther to withdraw more money.

Both men, from Northampton at the time of the offences, admitted a charge of being party to a fraudulent business. Delaney was sentenced to 24 months in prison, while Lowther was sentenced to 32 months custody for the Northamptonshire offences plus a further six months for similar offences in Nottinghamshire.

## Fraudulent letting agent jailed for 33 months

A former letting agent has been sentenced to 2 years and 9 months in prison after admitting fraud against both tenants and landlords.

Trained accountant Harpreet Garcha, who ran property lettings franchises 'Belvoir' in Kettering, Desborough and Corby, was investigated by us after a landlord made a complaint about being overcharged for routine maintenance at her rented home. Upon querying the cost of safety checks she had been provided with invoices for £502.50 – these were fakes as the contractor doing the work had only charged £166.25.

Garcha fraudulently generated significant profits at the expense of tenants and landlords, by covertly inflating contractors' bills for maintenance work.



The investigation found he had made around £200,000, amounting to an average mark up of approximately 30%.

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Garcha, of Bath Road, Kettering, was also convicted of providing false invoices to HMRC to reclaim VAT on business expenditure, making false statements in insurance claims on behalf of landlords which resulted in unjustified county court judgements against former tenants, and contempt of court for breaching a restraint order made under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

He admitted two counts of fraudulent trading, two counts of money laundering, five counts of insurance fraud and one offence of VAT fraud, committed between 2008 and 2012. Two further counts of mortgage fraud were left to lie on file.

His sentence included two-and-a-half years for the fraud-related offences and three months for the contempt of court offence, to run consecutively. He was also disqualified from acting as a director for nine years. We are now carrying out a financial investigation with a view to a confiscation order under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

Harpreet Garcha was the sole shareholder and director of a company called Five Rivers Enterprises Ltd that operated the three Belvoir franchises. New owners took over the Belvoir franchises in 2014.

Belvoir Property Management (UK) Ltd, the franchisor, was not the subject of any action relating to this case.

## Looking for a reliable trader? We can help!

Our Buy with Confidence scheme brings together gardeners, plumbers, builders, electricians and many other types of businesses from across the county who have been individually checked by us for trustworthiness and compliance with consumer protection laws.



Traders are only accepted onto our Buy with Confidence scheme if they pass stringent checks carried out, such as a full audit of the business and CRB checks for all employees.

To search for an approved business us, please visit the Buy with Confidence website [www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk](http://www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk) or call Northamptonshire County Council Customer Service Centre on 0300 126 1000 and ask for details of the Trading Standards approved trader scheme.

## Butcher sold meat unfit for human consumption

A Northampton butcher has been fined £14,000 after pleading guilty to selling meat which was unfit for human consumption and not of the quality demanded by consumers as well as falsely labelling other meat as of British origin.

We had purchased samples of the meat for testing which proved to have excessive protein breakdown – it was 'going off'. On revisiting the premises officers examined claims that meat on sale was of British origin. An investigation discovered that all the pre-packed chicken fillets and pork steaks were of foreign origin despite the pack labelling stating 'Country of Origin: British'. It is estimated that approximately 40 per cent of the meat being sold as British in the previous seven months was not of British origin.



Peter Salmons, who traded as The Meating Place in Billing Garden Village at the time, was fined a total of £14,000 plus costs of £2,099.02 and ordered to pay a victim surcharge of £120.

## Company prosecuted for sale of fire hazard heaters

A company has been fined after admitting supplying heaters that posed a risk of fire and electric shock. Our investigation started after receiving a complaint from a consumer about the heaters being sold from a shop in Kingsthorpe for £9.99 each.



Subsequent safety tests found the heaters failed in eight areas, including resistance to heat and fire and protection from live electrical parts. These are issues that consumers cannot detect for themselves. Consequently the importing company issued a national safety recall. In addition to the serious safety issues the heaters were also described as being halogen when the heating elements actually only consisted of a conventional heating coil.

Bonnington Plastics Ltd, based in Nottingham, admitted two offences relating to the safety and description of the product during a hearing at Wellingborough Magistrates' Court. The company was fined £5,000 and ordered to pay costs totalling £1,800.

## Illegally imported puppies quarantined

Three 10-week-old puppies from Latvia were taken into quarantine after they were illegally imported into the UK without being vaccinated against rabies. We attended a property in Corby after receiving information about the sale of a fourth puppy to a Swindon resident. The puppies were being sold for £600 each on Gumtree, the classified ads website.



Increasing numbers of puppies are being imported illegally into the UK from across Europe and are being sold via adverts on the internet and in newspaper small ads. Between April 2016 and March 2017 we have received eight illegal landing complaints, resulting in four dogs and one cat needing to be quarantined.

For dogs, cats and other mammals to enter the UK, it is necessary for them to have either spent four months in approved quarantine kennels or to have complied with the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme. The puppies were all too young to have been vaccinated against rabies as this can only take place once they are three months old.

For more information please visit [www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview](http://www.gov.uk/take-pet-abroad/overview)

## New no cold-calling zone launched in Corby

A scheme to tackle rogue trading and distraction burglaries has been launched in Corby.

The no cold-calling zone has been set up in Stadpeine Close after a number of cases where elderly or vulnerable residents have previously been targeted. High visibility signs have been put up in the street to show that this is a no cold-calling area and crime prevention packs including door advice stickers are being delivered to local residents.



The no cold-calling scheme has been initiated and funded by Corby Community Safety Partnership, which includes Northamptonshire County Council's Trading Standards, Corby Borough Council and Northamptonshire Police. Successful schemes are already operating across the county. **To report suspicious callers, residents should call 0345 23 07 702.**



## National Trading Standards' initiative to tackle scams

Scams affect the lives of millions of people across the UK. People who are scammed often experience loneliness, shame and social isolation.



Friends Against Scams is a National Trading Standards Scams Team initiative, which aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering communities to "Take a Stand Against Scams". It has been created to tackle the lack of scams awareness by providing information about scams and those who fall victim to them.

This information enables communities and organisations to understand scams, talk about scams and cascade messages throughout communities about scams prevention and protection.

Anybody can join Friends Against Scams and make a difference in their own way. For more information visit [www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk](http://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk)

## Sniffer dogs help uncover 2,500 packets of illegal cigarettes

Almost 2,500 packets of illegal cigarettes and 134 pouches of illegal hand rolling tobacco have been discovered in a series of raids in Northamptonshire.

With the help of trained sniffer dogs and Northamptonshire Police we uncovered the illicit tobacco concealed in premises in Northampton, Kettering and Corby.

All tobacco sold in the UK must have certain warnings in English and a picture warning, so anyone selling such products will know straight away that it is not legal. Investigations are now ongoing as a result of the raids.



## Counterfeit goods advertised on Facebook

We would like to remind people about the consequences of selling counterfeit goods following the execution of two warrants at residential properties in Rushden and Rothwell.



Both sellers had ignored previous warnings and continued to sell counterfeit goods on Facebook. Items included Nike trainers, Ralph Lauren tracksuits, DVDs of films, including ones currently showing at the cinema so not legitimately available on DVD. Officers seized a quantity of trade marked trainers, clothing, watches, sunglasses, computers and two mobile phones. Investigations are ongoing.

We regularly monitor social media as well as markets and car boot sales to identify sellers of counterfeit goods and will take appropriate enforcement action to ensure compliance. The maximum penalty for a breach of the Trade Marks Act is 10 years imprisonment or an unlimited fine.

**If you suspect someone may be selling counterfeit products, cheap tobacco or any other types of illicit or unsafe goods, you can report it by phoning the Citizens Advice consumer service on 03454 04 05 06**

## Rogue car salesman ordered to repay proceeds of his crimes

A car salesman who was jailed for making false representations about the cars he sold has been ordered to repay £35,000 under the Proceeds of Crime Act.



Spencer Hannon, of Rushden, was previously jailed for 3 years for defrauding 24 customers by giving them false information about the tax and MOT status, warranties, sale prices and history of vehicles they bought from his businesses in Northamptonshire and Bedfordshire.

Our investigation found Hannon had failed to disclose that vehicles he sold had been insurance write-offs, promised to tax and MOT cars but instead pocketed the money, and failed to honour warranties when customers reported faults with vehicles they bought from him. He was also said to have been aggressive towards customers who complained about poor quality cars he had sold them.

Hannon has been ordered to pay £35,000, including more than £28,000 in compensation to victims and was given three months to pay or he is liable to serve nine months in prison.

## Livestock keeper breached animal movement restrictions

A livestock keeper has admitted making an illegal movement of animals.

Since the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak there have been strict controls on the movements of livestock which affected the whole of England. Animals are no longer permitted to move from market to market or farm to farm without observing a compulsory standstill period. The trader breached the 6 day standstill for sheep by moving a group of animals from one market and selling them at another market 3 days later. The standstill allows time for any animal diseases to be detected and also contributes to ensuring the welfare of animals.



There are different standstill rules for different species. Details of the standstill and other controls for keeping farm animals can be found at: [www.gov.uk/topic/keeping-farmed-animals](http://www.gov.uk/topic/keeping-farmed-animals)

## Button battery safety warning

Inside some electronic devices are button cell batteries that, if swallowed by small children, can get stuck in the throat and cause severe burns within two hours, or even death. These batteries can be found in toys, musical books, key fobs, remote controls, calculators and other small electronic devices.



Ensure your child does not have access to these devices if the battery compartment is not secure, make certain that spare batteries are locked away and used batteries are disposed of correctly.

If your child does swallow a button cell battery, seek medical advice immediately.

For further advice on safety issues, visit the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) website [www.rosipa.com](http://www.rosipa.com)

## To make a complaint, provide information or get advice

Our partner organisation, the Citizens Advice consumer service provides free, confidential and impartial advice on consumer issues and will refer cases to us where further action may be appropriate.

The service will provide information on all consumer issues, including:

- advice before you buy
- businesses acting unfairly or illegally
- cancellation of contracts for goods or services
- faulty goods
- guarantees
- scams
- unsatisfactory service



Therefore, if you have a complaint about a trader or need advice or information on problems with goods or services please visit [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/consumer/), or call the Citizens Advice consumer service helpline on **03454 04 05 06**.

## Please give us your feedback on this newsletter or our work

Please write, call or email us on the contact details below; we really value your opinion.

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NN4 0GB

Tel: 0300 126 1000

Email: [tradestd@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:tradestd@northamptonshire.gov.uk)

Website: [www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/tradingstandards)



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If you have had reason to contact us or the Citizens Advice consumer service and would like to take part in a short online survey regarding satisfaction with our service and suggestions for future improvements please visit <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/TS1617Cons1>