

# Monmouthshire County Council's trading standards officers provide advice to counter coronavirus scams

26th March 2020

Monmouthshire's trading standards team is warning the county's communities to be aware of people taking advantage of the coronavirus pandemic to carry out scams. The advice is in line with that given by National Trading Standards – the UK body set up to protect consumers and safeguard business from fraud.

Reports have been received from other parts of the country that people have been offered miracle cures or non-existent vaccines for coronavirus while bogus emails have promised a refund on taxes in order to fraudulently obtain personal and bank details. Other scams include an offer to carry out shopping or collect medication and asking for money in advance before disappearing, and people impersonating healthcare workers to gain access to homes.

Trading standards officers have issued the following tips to residents to avoid being caught out:

- Be cautious and listen to your instincts. Don't be afraid to hang up, bin it, delete it or shut the door.
- Take your time; don't be rushed.
- If someone claims to represent a charity, ask them for ID. Be suspicious of requests for money up front. Check with family and friends before accepting offers of help if you are unsure.
- If you are online, be aware of fake news and use trusted sources such as .gov.uk or NHS.uk websites. Don't click on links in emails.
- Only purchase goods from legitimate retailers and take a moment to think before parting with money or personal information.
- Know who you're dealing with - if you need help, talk to someone you know or get in touch with your local trading standards service.
- Protect your financial information, especially from people you don't know. Never give your bank card or PIN to a stranger.

Residents who believe they have been scammed should contact Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040. If they need advice, they should call the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133. Meanwhile, residents should contact their bank if they think their accounts have been compromised.

Councillor Sara Jones, Monmouthshire's cabinet member with responsibility for trading standards said: "The coronavirus pandemic has brought forward many good people who have offered their services for the benefit of society but the county's residents should be aware that not everyone out there is trustworthy. Some will take advantage of this unusual situation we're currently facing. Generally, we should

exercise caution and if an unexpected offer sounds too good to be true, it probably is too good to be true.”