

### Advice when supporting a victim of doorstep crime.

If your client is having repair work done to their home, particularly if it was unexpected, we ask you to consider the possibility that a crime has taken place. Things may not always have been done in the client's best interest and there are lines of investigation that the Trading Standards team may be able to explore, if you work with us on this.

Here are some points to consider:

- Is there any paperwork like a contract or an estimate. For contracts agreed in someone's home for goods or services over £42 in value, the trader must issue paperwork to the customer. There are requirements as to what must be included in the paperwork, so we would expect the document to go into a lot of detail about the identity of the trader and the nature of the work being done. If you find there is no paperwork with your client or what they have is quite limited in detail, please contact the Trading Standards team for further advice.
- The legislation also allows for a 14-day cooling off period for contracts agreed in people's homes (as long as the value is over £42). But for emergency repairs like a burst water pipe, the customer can sign to ask the trader to go ahead with the work, they wouldn't have to wait 14 days for the pipe to be fixed. What we see happen is that doorstep criminals ask their customers to sign, to go ahead with the job. But what they are signing for isn't an emergency repair or for urgent work. There are specific words that must be included in the document the trader gives to the customer, so we would suggest that you contact the Trading Standards team for help. It may be the case the document hasn't been written correctly and we would be able to tell you that. But crucially please remember if your client wants to cancel the work going ahead, if it hasn't started yet, there is legally only a 14-day window to do this.
- Has any work been carried out? Some traders will charge the customer and say that the roof has been fixed or that guttering has been replaced for example. But if you can't see any new work, or materials that have been installed, your client may have been the victim of a crime. Again, contact the Trading Standards team.
- If you are checking the bank account of your client, and they told you the job was to cost £5k. Have they actually paid £5k? Some traders will 'help' their customers with a lift to the bank in their van, and then outside the bank 'guide' the customer with answers for the bank staff's questions. It isn't unusual for people to end up paying a lot more than the quoted price and it's important, that you are able to work out the true value of the money paid by your client. Sadly, some doorstep crime losses are in the hundreds of thousands of pounds, as it is the traders who exploits vulnerabilities they have seen in the client.
- If the trader has been inside the client's home, check with the client or their family whether any valuables are missing. There is a known crime link between what is often called 'rogue trading' and distraction burglary. Missing items need to be reported to the police as a theft has taken place.

- Sadly, more than one doorstep criminal may target the client. It's as if there is a communication network between the rogues, alerting them to potential targets. So, protections and support tools need to be put in place, as soon as the first incident is discovered, to guard against subsequent visits and further crimes. As an example, there are people that had spray foam installed. Those same people were then called on again by a second company, who told them the spray foam needed to be 'checked' for a fee. Then subsequently another company arrived and told them the foam wasn't installed correctly and must be removed, again for a fee.
- The Trading Standards team can supply doorstep crime advice packs, including door stickers that can help prevent doorstep callers. Where possible try to distribute door stickers to neighbouring houses as well as your client's. If only one property in a street is displaying a sticker, it could be a sign to callers that a vulnerable person lives there.
- At the time of writing this guidance, (Jan '25) the Trading Standards team has access to free video doorbells through our National Trading Standards colleagues. If you have a client that would benefit from the installation of this valuable protection tool, contact the team. We also have available within our team, dummy CCTV cameras that we can supply.

The Trading Standards team is very experienced at supporting victims of doorstep crime, when people in their own homes have been coerced into having work done, often overpriced and unnecessary. Our enforcement action in this area can lead to prosecution and other sanctions, as there is consumer protection legislation in place including the Fraud Act. Please let us know if you need our help with a case that you are dealing with. At the very least our team has access to secure databases where details of problem traders including their business name and contact information can be shared with enforcement colleagues across the country. But we don't want any victim of doorstep crime in the borough to be unsupported. A crime has been committed just as if they had been robbed in the street, and it's the role of Trading Standards to investigate this type of crime.