

Advice for supporting victims of mail fraud including prize draws and lottery scams.

Many people receive letters offering prize draw winnings or entry in a lottery, sometimes from a different country Australia or Canada for example. The amounts of money offered as prizes in these letters are massive and the language used is extremely persuasive. People can also receive letters from psychics and clairvoyants that offer them a better future or to reconnect with loved ones. Other letters offer investment opportunities or claim to be about an inheritance. Criminals are behind these letters, and they are very skilled at using controlling techniques to persuade people to reply. They use mail merges to send letters to thousands of people while at the same time making the letters extremely personal. They will often refer to the recipient by their first name in the body of the letter, to make it appear that they 'know' the person or that they are 'friends'. All the letters will ask for a fee to be sent, sometimes called an administration fee or a processing charge. They might ask for bank details to transfer the 'winnings or for copies of documents like passports. Once a person replies to these letters, their details will be shared between the criminals, and they will start to receive more of this type of mail.

The Trading Standards team is very experienced at supporting victims of fraud, including mail fraud so please contact the team if you need our help. While many of these letters are sent to the borough from abroad, and we may not have any lines of investigation to follow, there are still support measures that we can help you with for your client.

- Victims of mail fraud are often told to keep their so-called winnings secret, this can make it very difficult when you are trying to help the person, because they believe the criminals rather than people that are there to support them. It might take several tries to get through to your client if they are in denial. As practitioners in this field, because of the controlling nature of the relationship between the criminal and the client, it will take time.
- Look around their living room during your visit. Is your client surrounded by piles of 'stuff', often worthless items given by the criminals as 'free gifts' to thank them for their response or as a token to 'look after them' in the future. It could be trinkets, stones, amulets, and other articles that are meant to change the person's life. Or perhaps you can see lots of vitamins, supplements, skin products or other mail ordered items. Many fake competition letters ask the person to purchase goods to improve their chances of winning, or perhaps the client has received a mail order catalogue that offers prizes, after they have made a purchase.
- Your client should be advised to throw away any mail they receive from people and companies they don't know. For a client that is used to receiving this type of mail and is responding to requests for money to be sent, that will be difficult. They will be believing the false reality that the criminals, behind these letters, has created. But perhaps you are helping a client who has only received one or two of these letters. It is much more straightforward for them to discard, these early letters before their details are shared and they end up receiving many more letters.
- Always recommend that your client registers with the Mailing Preference Service [Registration | MPS Online](#) It takes 4 months from registration to take full effect but this will reduce the number of unwanted letters they receive from genuine companies in the UK. Unfortunately, it won't stop the criminals' letters, but it might support your advice about the

fraudulent mailings, if you are able to show the difference between those letters and reputable letters from a genuine UK company.

- If your client has a letter that is supposedly from a solicitor, their details can be checked with the Solicitors Registration Authority [SRA | Solicitors Register | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#) Their website also issues regular scam alerts [SRA | Scam alerts | Solicitors Regulation Authority](#) so if your client has a letter offering asset recovery or claims to be able to get investment funds returned, then check with these alerts to see if any warnings have already been issued.
- If you can help your client to recognise that these letters are fraudulent, and they want to stop responding. It can be incredibly powerful and beneficial to the client's recovery from the fraud to get them to discard the letters with you. Significant actions like tearing the mail up or shredding the mail, can help the client acknowledge that the letters have no real worth and they need to discard them. If they want to take an extra step, they can always turn the tables on the criminals behind the letters, by becoming a Scam Marshal for the National Trading Standards Scams Team. Its free to sign up and Marshals receive regular freepost bags to send their recent scam mail, and envelopes to the Scams Team. The team investigates all the mail they receive and use it to disrupt as much as possible, the activities of these criminals. [227266649.pdf](#)
- We need to work with the client on the support they need to recover, and we must take our actions with them, rather than carry out actions on them. We may have to get help from family members too but be aware the client's family could be estranged because of their loved one's response to the scam letters. The mailings can be extremely divisive and can cause relationships to break down. Think Jessica is an organisation that raises awareness of this. [Jessica's Story | Think Jessica](#) The same site also has Jessica's daughter Marilyn Baldwin's story [Marilyn's Story | Think Jessica](#)

Your client might come around and begin to see through the fraudulent letters following your advice and support, but as professionals we will have to be patient. Remember your client may be feeling frightened, if the money sent or the purchases made have got out of control, or embarrassed that they have been taken in by the criminals. Unfortunately, you may have to accept that your client might never come around to following your advice. So it is for the professionals, the family, and all partners involved in safeguarding the client, to minimise the fraud as far as possible and maximise the support that the client will allow.