

Essex Police Fraud Alert System

6

4th September 2020

Gift Card Scams—Have HMRC *really* contacted you?

Many of us are aware that criminals regularly make telephone calls claiming to be HMRC. Increasingly, they are making these calls claiming that there is a warrant out for the arrest of the recipient and that they are required to pay their 'outstanding debt' in order to avoid arrest. However, they proceed to ask the recipient to pay off this debt using gift cards, including Amazon and iTunes gift cards.

Due to the fact that gift cards are relatively untraceable, this proves to be a low-risk, high-reward scam. As recently as this week, four people paid £1,000 each in Peterborough.

What to look out for:

- 1 **You cannot pay bills or outstanding debts using gift cards**
- 2 Fraudsters claiming to be from HMRC **will try to panic you** by informing you there is a warrant out for your arrest
- 3 Once the gift cards have been purchased, **scammers will ask you to scratch off the back of the gift cards** and send them the codes underneath—this is particularly suspicious if they ask them to be sent via platforms such as WhatsApp.
- 4 If you are unsure, **hang up**, and call back on a trusted number. Never use a number supplied by the person on the phone, and use an alternative phone if possible. Genuine organisations have no issue with you confirming who they are.

If you think you have been a victim of this scam or have received similar calls claiming to be from HMRC, report to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040 or at www.actionfraud.police.uk



This can also happen to businesses

Be alert for any unusual requests from colleagues asking to purchase gift cards and check whether they have come from a genuine email address.

Gift Card Scams— Fake Asda email

Over 100 reports have been received of an email circulating claiming to be from Asda offering a £1,000 gift card for filling in an online form.

These emails are known as **phishing** and use prizes to entice people to give out their personal information.

Fake emails from supermarket chains are particularly common and offer a large shopping voucher in return for completing online forms/surveys. They will often be accompanied by a number of glowing reviews from customers who allegedly received a voucher.

The reports of phishing emails have escalated during lockdown, with criminals increasingly turning to online scams to target those who have been spending more time at home.

Earlier in the year, Essex Trading Standards released the following statement:

“Please be aware of these scam emails circulating to be from various supermarkets.

The scammers cloak the email in the branding of a popular supermarket chain and inform the recipient that they have received a money off voucher to assist with purchases during the quarantine.

The email then directs the recipient to click a link so that they may claim the coupon. Rather than being a kind offer from some of Britain’s most popular chains, it is a fraudulent email which aims to steal the credit card details of the recipient.

Look out for the telltale signs that the voucher offer is a scam, such as poor spelling and grammar; however, this is not always the case, and many look identical to official supermarket emails.

Never click the links or input your card details.

If an offer sounds too good to be true, then it probably is.”



If you think you have received a phishing email, forward it on to the Suspicious Email Reporting Service (SERS) at

report@phishing.gov.uk

Keep up to date with fraud and
do **even more** Online  [essex.police.uk](https://www.essex.police.uk) 

