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Essex Police Fraud Alert System

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30th October 2020



POLICE REPATRIATE ROMANCE FRAUD VICTIMS WITH £115,000 THROUGH INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP WITH GHANAIAN AUTHORITIES

At the start of the month, EFAS distributed information regarding a national campaign regarding romance fraud. The campaign, which launched on Thursday 8 October, follows a 26 percent rise in reports of romance fraud to Action Fraud in the last year.

Operational activity conducted by the City of London Police's National Fraud Intelligence Bureau (NFIB), key stakeholders and police forces in the UK, has directly led to the identification of 38 victims of romance fraud who had not previously reported the crime to Action Fraud. A number of these victims are believed to have still been in contact with suspects online and weren't yet aware they were victims of a romance fraud. Those identified are now receiving support from their local police force and a number of their cases have been prioritised for investigation. One such case has already led to two arrests in the East of England by officers from the Eastern Region Special Operations Unit (ERSOU) who were able to recover a number of live devices during the arrests. From these devices, work is underway to identify linked bank accounts suspected of being in receipt of money taken from romance victims. Once identified, these accounts will be subject to freezing orders, preventing the suspects from accessing the money.



If you or someone you know is vulnerable and has been a victim of fraud, please call **Essex Police** on 101
Report fraud or attempted fraud by contacting **Action Fraud** at actionfraud.police.uk or call 0300 123 2040

Keep up to date with fraud and
do **even more** Online at essex.police.uk



A key feature of this campaign was to target criminals overseas suspected of committing romance fraud against UK victims. This follows the creation of partnerships between the City of London Police, the National Crime Agency (NCA) and their counterparts in Ghana. Via the City of London Police's NFIB, UK forces are now able to send intelligence referrals to the Ghanaian authorities where they have identified suspects based in Ghana or with a link to the country. This new relationship between Ghanaian authorities and the City of London Police has led to £115,000 being repatriated to UK victims of romance fraud and two active investigations being launched in Ghana into suspects thought to be defrauding victims in the UK.

How can you spot the signs?

You've struck up a relationship with someone online and they declare their love for you quite quickly.

They constantly make up excuses why they can't video chat or meet in person and they try and move your conversation off the platform that you met on.

They claim to be overseas, working in the military or medical profession. They might say they are abroad, carrying out vital work, including charity work. This helps them paint a picture of themselves as being heroic, trustworthy and reliable, and also gives them an excuse for the use of international dialling codes or poor internet connection.

When they ask for your help, it will be for a time critical emergency. The reason will be something emotive, which pulls at your heartstrings. They'll open up to you about a problem, or something that is worrying them to appear vulnerable and make you feel sorry for them. They may get defensive if you decline to help.

They tell you to keep your relationship private and insist that you don't discuss anything you talk about with your friends and family. This also includes the crisis they find themselves in that requires money. They will convince you this is part of the normal privacy that forms a healthy relationship.

How can you protect yourself?

Avoid giving away too many personal details when speaking online to someone you've never met in person, as it can lead to your identity being stolen. This includes revealing your full name, date of birth and home address - even if you're doing it for what seems to be harmless reasons, such as your partner wants to send you flowers or a gift.

Stay on the site's messaging service until you meet in person. Criminals want to quickly switch to other platforms that are less regulated and have better encryption, so there's no evidence of them asking you for money.

On social media, only accept friend requests from people you know and trust.

Most online platforms have a reporting tool which you can use if you suspect someone online is using pictures that don't belong to them, you are suspicious of their behaviour, or they have asked you for money. Reporting their user profile means it can be blocked which helps protect others.

If their pictures seem too perfect or doesn't match up with what they tell you about themselves, you can perform a reverse image search on Google to see if the photos have been taken from somewhere, or someone, else.



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