

The Oasis Centre - Cornwall

Registered Charity Number 1139355, founded to serve the communities in the parishes of St Columb Major, St Mawgan-in-Pydar, St Eval and St Ervan



Looking Out for Dodgy Builders

Number 08 in a series of notes on important issues.

This note is about dodgy builders, not the tens of thousands of genuine builders that work to give value for money to their customers up and down the country but the fraudsters that attempt to defraud vulnerable people and to give genuine builders a bad name.

First a short story – a vulnerable elderly lady went into her bank on two consecutive days, to transfer large sums of money – for building work. When the staff asked her about this, she said a man had knocked at her door to say she needed some work done on her roof. He took her to the rear of the house, put a ladder up the back, went up and pulled at roof tiles and flashing around the chimney. He then took down all her details and telephoned later to quote £4,500 for his purchase of supplies. That was why she first went to her bank to arrange a transfer. The next morning she received a request for an additional £9,000, otherwise the work could not be completed. When she went to the bank to transfer that amount, it was questioned and the issue came to light.

Thousands of pounds can be taken from vulnerable people as quickly and simply as that. There is not much that the police can do. A contract with a builder is a civil rather than a police matter. It is not a crime to charge a lot for an item or a service –look at the prices for designer goods and meals at top restaurants! The police would have to prove that the charge is excessive and that the ‘builder’ did not intend to do the work – very difficult!

There are other things these fraudsters can do. They can travel around noting the details of sign boards erected by genuine builders. Six months or a year later, they will call round to do a ‘guarantee check’. Surprise, surprise, more work is needed for which an advance payment is requested. They can also call on neighbours offering to do essential work they “happened to notice” while working down the road! They can even put up ladders and disappear up on to the roof before you answer the door and may create the ‘defects’ they offer to remedy.

Genuine builders do not make cold calls. They are happy to provide written estimates and references. Many, perhaps most, people are sufficiently robust to see through fraudsters that imitate them and to send them packing. Those at risk are the more vulnerable members of our society. The police will welcome the intelligence (on the 101 number) if builders’ vans or skips unexpectedly appear outside a vulnerable neighbour’s house.

Bear in mind that the vehicles used by dodgy builders are unlikely to bear genuine names or contact details. The registration numbers of such vehicles are always worth noting however.

Jeremy Simmonds, Chair, The Oasis Centre - Cornwall