



**Open Report on behalf of Glen Garrod,  
Executive Director of Adult Care and Community Wellbeing**

Report to:	<b>Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date:	<b>31 October 2023</b>
Subject:	<b>Safer Lincolnshire Partnership – Fraud Update Report</b>

**Summary:**

This report provides an update on the collaborative working undertaken by the Crime and Disorder Core Priority Group of the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership and as part of the Community Safety in Partnership Agreement between Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Police, during the last 12 months. The current priority of the Crime and Disorder Priority Group is focused on digitally enabled fraud and ID theft.

**Actions Required:**

Members of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee are invited to review the content of the report and offer comment on the continued delivery of the work of the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership's Crime and Disorder Core Priority Group in the proposed format.

## **1. Background**

The Safer Lincolnshire Partnership (SLP) identified that fraud continues to pose a risk to the residents of Lincolnshire and focuses its attention on prevention of digitally enabled fraud and Identity (ID) theft. The main aim of the Crime and Disorder Core Priority Group is to reduce victimisation through targeted prevention activity and success will be noted by way of the delivery of identified prevention activity and by increased awareness of the risks of fraud. Appendix A shows the current structure of the SLP and where the Crime and Disorder Core Priority Group features within this.

The Crime and Disorder Core Priority Group is made up of partners from a range of organisations. This includes Lincolnshire County Council (LCC) Trading Standards Service, Community Safety Service, Adults Safeguarding Team, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, Lincolnshire Police Fraud Protect team, Lincolnshire Safeguarding Adults Board (LSAB),

Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Age UK Lindsey, Age UK Lincoln and South Lincolnshire, North Kesteven District Council, South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership and Citizens Advice Lincolnshire.

Fraud is the act of gaining a dishonest advantage, often financial, over another person. There are many different types of fraud: those frauds highlighted by the most recent Strategic Needs Assessment (2021) use digital technology to enable the crime. Digitally enabled fraud is defined as crimes which do not depend on computers or networks but have been transformed in scale or form by use of the internet and communications technology. This definition is taken from the [Cybercrime prosecution guidance, The Crown Prosecution Service \(cps.gov.uk\)](#).

Anyone can be a victim of fraud, but our vulnerable residents are most at risk. Individuals can be vulnerable for various reasons; this can include age, locality, digital skills, and social connections. Fraud has been shown to have a significant impact on vulnerable victims, not only financially but on their health and wellbeing. The work of the group seeks to ensure our residents are informed and better able to protect themselves from being a victim or repeat victim of fraud.

## **2. Prevalence**

As mentioned, a Strategic Needs Assessment in 2021 (undertaken by Lincolnshire County Council Community Safety Analysts) highlighted digitally enabled fraud and ID theft as a growing threat for those living and working in Lincolnshire. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2021 National Crime Survey [Crime in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#) found 'large increases in "advance fee fraud", "consumer and retail fraud" and "other fraud" that may indicate fraudsters taking advantage of behaviour changes related to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, such as increased online shopping and increased savings'. Action Fraud data from the last 12 months confirms that over 4000 reports of fraud have been made by Lincolnshire residents and businesses. Of these, 70% of reports were cyber enabled and 926 reports were coded as online shopping and auction related - [NFIB Dashboard \(Public\) \(arcgis.com\)](#).

## **3. Prevention Activity**

The Core Priority Group identified five objectives to reduce victimisation amongst those at risk of digitally enabled fraud and ID theft by way of prevention activity. These include the following:

- Activity A - Work with partners to organise community events to raise awareness of digitally enabled fraud in localities where evidence suggests those are most at risk.
- Activity B - Prevention of victimisation (or further victimisation) through the installation of call blockers.
- Activity C - Preventative activity targeting the activities of digitally enabled criminal traders.

- Activity D - Reduce victimisation through targeted prevention to increase awareness of digitally enabled fraud and ID theft amongst those working with our most vulnerable individuals.
- Activity E - Reduce victimisation through targeted prevention to increase awareness of digitally enabled fraud and ID theft amongst individuals who have limited access to mainstream prevention messaging.

Activity A - Work with partners to organise community events to raise awareness of digitally enabled fraud in localities where evidence suggests those are most at risk

A variety of communications and engagement activities have taken place over the last year. Community events have been hosted in partnership between LCC, Lincolnshire Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) and other partners. Examples include:

- a) An event was hosted in Skegness by County Care where adults with learning disabilities and their carers engaged with staff to discuss fraud and scams in person.
- b) Two events were hosted in the Sleaford area with a particular focus on romance fraud and doorstep fraud.
- c) Lincolnshire Show in June where conversations took place about fraud and resources were distributed.
- d) UKRO festival at Lincoln Castle – community engagement activity and a fraud and scams survey were undertaken. Survey results will feed into future service and prevention activity.
- e) Age UK Lindsey Information Bus - in collaboration with LCC Community Safety team across East and West Lindsey in public spaces from May until September.
- f) Community talks undertaken by dedicated officers from LCC and Lincolnshire Police across the County.

In addition to these community events, social media posts raising awareness of fraud and scams were posted weekly on Lincs Trading Standards social media pages and regularly on LCC's main page, Lincolnshire Police and OPCC social media pages and on Lincs Alert. Awareness resources such as booklets and leaflets are available and regularly updated to ensure they contain up to date information.

Activity B - Prevention of victimisation (or further victimisation) through the installation of call blockers.

Through collaboration, 80 True Call units have been installed (1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023) in the homes of those identified as vulnerable to fraud by Lincolnshire Police Fraud Protect team and the LCC Scams Intervention and Prevention Officer. The total of nuisance calls blocked by the 80 units at the end of the last financial year was 9327, and the total number of scam calls blocked was 2547. Having utilised the National Trading Standards Scams Team (NTSST) Optimity calculator, it is estimated that the wider savings to society (including healthcare and health related quality of life savings) from installing these 80 units is £1.3 million.

The installation of the call blockers also provided the users of the blockers with significant personal benefits:

- Over 93% felt more confident answering the phone.
- Over 93% would recommend a call blocker to others.
- 90% of those asked said the unit had a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Comments from individuals confirm the benefits they experienced using the units. These include:

- *The call blocker has made me feel safer and no longer pestered by calls.*
- *I'm now able to sleep at night as was constantly being harassed by scam/cold/nuisance calls that interrupted sleep.*
- *Having the call blocker installed has been a complete positive as nothing "untoward" has occurred on the landline phone since it was installed.*
- *I've not had any unknown calls and it makes me relaxed about answering the phone.*
- *Not had one scam call, found it wonderful, taken the weight off my back.*

There have been some challenges to installing the call blocker units in homes, these include:

- the impact of covid and ensuring it was safe to enter people's homes.
- concerns around the digital switchover (now resolved).
- geographical issues because Lincolnshire is a large area and takes time to travel across the County.
- some individuals refused to have units installed and officers changed their language and now refer to the units as scam filters, not call blockers.
- individuals have been concerned that the calls they want may not get through, but these were easily allayed when the operating functions were explained.

Staff in both partner organisations have worked proactively and flexibly to ensure the needs of those at risk are assessed and support is provided where need is identified. Our aim now is to ensure that future victims and those at risk have access to suitable protection from this fraud. Funding has been secured to ensure additional call blocker units are available for use in the next financial year.

#### Activity C - Preventative activity targeting digitally enabled criminal traders

In late 2021, National Trading Standards highlighted concern in relation to criminal traders utilising digital formats such as Facebook marketplace/groups and online trader platforms. The Core Priority Group committed to share with Lincolnshire residents doorstep crime (digitally enabled) campaign materials on social media pages, on suitable websites and targeted information in local publications.

Over the course of 11 months the partners, in particular LCC Trading Standards and Community Safety Services, set about delivering a comprehensive campaign aimed at raising awareness of the new risk within communities across Lincolnshire. In September 2022 a poster campaign was initiated across Lincolnshire Libraries 'Criminals are adapting'. The poster gave information about this developing concern and provided reporting information. Following on from this a news release was shared entitled [Don't be caught out by online scammers – Lincolnshire County Council](#), this was backed up by a six part social media campaign on Twitter and Facebook – 'Doorstep crime has moved online!' There was a reach of over 12,000 impressions with these posts across the campaign. Users were advised to look at the doorstep crime information on the Friends Against Scams (FAS) website and a significant increase in traffic to these pages was noted by [FAS](#).

A sentencing hearing in March 2023 enabled the publication of the following news release [Prison for rogue trader who cheated over £140,000 out of his victims – Lincolnshire County Council](#) - a criminal trader that used online trader platforms to steal from victims received a prison sentence in excess of six years. This piece was taken up by press all over the country including some of the daily national newspapers.

Bolstered by new work undertaken nationally to understand online trader platforms, combined with a survey completed by Trading Standards East Midlands Community Safety group highlighting key areas of concern for consumers engaging with online traders, a second social media campaign was delivered in May 2023. This campaign used the 'Think, Research, Compare' line to encourage consumers to take certain steps before engaging with a tradesperson. These posts were shared by LCC main, LCC Trading Standards and Safer Lincolnshire Partnership social media pages, along with support from OPCC social media pages. The combined reach over Twitter and Facebook was 15,699 impressions. A piece was also shared with the [Town and parish council newsletter May 2023 \(mailchi.mp\)](#) in May and the [Safer Lincolnshire Partnership - June 2023 \(mailchi.mp\)](#) in June.

Final steps were taken when a national Citizens Advice campaign reinforced the messages with their 'find a trader you can trust – we've seen a rise in scammers posing as builders or home improvement companies' social media posts for their Scam Awareness campaign.

Considerable work has been undertaken over the last year to raise awareness of criminal traders using online trader platforms. This work will now continue on a business-as-usual basis. Partners now have several assets available to them to continue to share and raise awareness on a routine basis.

#### Activity D - Reduce victimisation through targeted prevention to increase awareness of digitally enabled fraud amongst those working with our most vulnerable individuals

In order to offer prevention to our most vulnerable residents the group committed to raising awareness with those working with vulnerable people. LCC has mandatory training available to all staff delivered via an e-learning platform; 1437 sessions were completed including Lincolnshire Libraries staff, LCC staff and District Council staff along with some carers, charities and voluntary organisations. Lincolnshire Police Fraud Protect team delivered 44 Professionals Presentations; these were attended by 474 professionals.

Using the NTSST Optimity calculator it is estimated that this work to raise awareness with staff has saved individuals and wider society £112,978.

Bespoke training is now being offered to LCC Adult Care and Community Wellbeing staff via a webinar 'Fraud and scams: Supporting Vulnerable Victims in Lincolnshire'. The sessions are ideally for those that have already undertaken the Friends Against Scams e-learning, to explore in more detail the experience of vulnerable victims of scams and fraud. The session will look at a range of situations in which vulnerable people have been victimised and focus on how to recognise signs in day-to-day practice. Case study examples will be considered for learners to reflect on practice and look to options for support and prevention. These are scheduled to go ahead in January and March 2024. If successful, the sessions will be delivered to partner organisations utilising connections via the LSB.

#### Activity E - Reduce victimisation through targeted prevention to increase awareness of digitally enabled fraud amongst individuals who have limited access to mainstream prevention messaging

The Core Priority group is keen to ensure that all those living and working in Lincolnshire have access to prevention messages about fraud. To this end, the group identified the following as areas to focus on:

- Those without digital skills.
- Those who do not use the internet or social media platforms.
- Those for whom English is a second language.
- Those who have sensory and other impairments that may impact on receiving mainstream prevention messages.

This is the most recent piece of work undertaken by the group and it is currently being looked at by a small task and finish group to ensure that all the relevant evidence is in place. Some initial mapping has taken place to understand what existing services and opportunities are available for the group to work with to take this forward.

Current opportunities that are being utilised include a regular item on BBC Radio Lincolnshire to communicate prevention messages, promoting a FAS webinar that is delivered in British Sign Language (BSL), FAS materials that have been translated into other languages spoken in Lincolnshire and several schemes promoting digital skills around the County.

In order to be responsive to changes in the fraud landscape a pending analytical review will provide an update to our current picture. This intelligence will ensure we continue to focus our efforts and energy on the most primary areas of concern.

#### **4. Community Safety – Safer Together Partnership Agreement**

Following a pause in development due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the LCC and Lincolnshire Police Safer Together Partnership working agreement has been undergoing further

development. This is a commitment between LCC and Lincolnshire Police to work in collaboration to:

- Engage with and understand our communities, to ensure we best meet their needs and provide services that are impactful and proven to work.
- Work alongside our communities, informing and empowering them to take action to protect themselves and others.
- Improve our collective communications strategy and public facing information.

An example of this work is the role of the Scams Intervention and Prevention Officer providing support to victims of scams and fraud and those at risk of these crimes. This role is a shining example of partnership working, hosted by LCC Community Safety service, funded by LCC Trading Standards service, embedded in the Lincolnshire Police Prevention and Partnerships team and with close links to LCC Adults Safeguarding team. This support is tailored to the individual and their right to choose the type and level of intervention for them is respected. Support can be delivered by letter, telephone call, email or face to face and ranges from providing information about how a victim can get their money back all the way through to holistic support provided to the victim over several weeks or months. This includes understanding the signs of scams and fraud, how victims can protect themselves in the future and any ongoing referrals required to support any needs identified. This includes referrals to Adult Social Care, the Wellbeing service, Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue, voluntary organisations providing benefits checks and debt advice, health services and housing services to name a few.

In the previous financial year, the officer supported 93 individuals. Again, utilising the NTSST Optimity calculator, this support saved individuals and wider society £338,975. This provision is likely to see an uplift in demand as a result of continued awareness raising and engagement activity undertaken via the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership and individual agencies.

Another example of the benefits of this close working relationship can be seen through the ability to share information. Due to the agreed partnership, specified officers from LCC and Lincolnshire Police have access to organisational databases to allow for ease of support for victims and intelligence gathering for enforcement purposes.

## **5. Conclusion**

It is hoped that this report demonstrates the fantastic work currently undertaken through collaboration within the SLP Crime and Disorder Core Priority Group and by LCC and other committed partners. Prevention is at the heart of keeping those living and working within Lincolnshire safe from digitally enabled fraud. Partners have been creative in the way they approach prevention activity and delivered a variety of activities to ensure key messages are heard and support is provided where most needed.

For additional information on fraud and scams please go to [Become a Friend Against Scams by completing the Online Learning course, then "Take a Stand Against Scams" \(friendsagainstscams.org.uk\)](https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk)

## 6. Appendices

These are listed below and attached at the back of the report	
Appendix A	Safer Lincolnshire Partnership Structure Chart

## 7. Background Papers

No background papers within Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972 were used in the preparation of this report.

This report was written by Vicky Salmon, Community Safety Strategy Co-ordinator, who can be contacted at [vicky.salmon@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:vicky.salmon@lincolnshire.gov.uk).