



Visit our website at: www.villagewatch.co.uk and join our Group on *Facebook*

Our Advice Shop has Re-opened

Saturday 20th August, 10 am to 12 noon
Robert Dickinson Building, Sibson Road

(Next to the Public Car Park opposite the Garden Centre)

See our range of free and 'at cost' security items and take the opportunity to renew your Watch Membership

Membership Subscriptions

We are still seeking the best method to enable Members to pay their annual subscriptions to the Watch. Our previous envelope collection worked very well but required a lot of 'behind the scenes' work that we cannot sustain at this time.

Charity-based online services charge fees that would consume the most of our standard £1 per household.

A number of Members were able to do so when they visited our stall at the Birstall Gala in June and at our Advice Shop that has now re-opened.

If you are in the area when we are open, please drop in and collect your Membership Card for 2022-23.

Energy Crisis Scam Risks

Energy prices are rising at an alarming rate and there have been several government grants and discount schemes announced to help consumers cope. Scammers have, predictably, jumped on that bandwagon. There has been a significant increase in scammers impersonating energy firms, trying to trick victims into handing over money or payment details.

It is possible that you have received an email offering an energy refund from *Eon* saying that you were entitled to an £85 refund. If you are not an *Eon* customer you will realise that it is fake. However, if you are, the message that 'Our system indicates that an error in our billing procedures has led to an overcharge' might sound like good news. Unfortunately, clicking on the link and entering your bank details will only lead to bad news.

Your energy supplier already has your payment details and has no need to send an unsolicited email or text requesting them. Energy suppliers commonly include links in their emails and scammers can easily spoof organisations by using an email display name of their choice. Always check the full underlying email address of the sender, instead of just glancing at the display name. Do not be afraid to call your energy supplier, using the number on its genuine website, to check whether what you have been told is true.

Fraudsters are also imitating *Ofgem*. There have been emails claiming to be from the energy regulator offering a rebate. The message is linked to a convincing but fake *Ofgem* site that requests you to set up a direct debit to receive the money. Direct debits are a means to pay money not receive it.

Households are receiving rebates on council tax and discounts on energy bills but these are being applied automatically using details already known.

The collapse of some smaller energy companies in recent years has created confusion that scammers have quickly

exploited. Earlier this year, some former customers of *Brilliant Energy*, that ceased trading in 2019, received demands from a fake debt recovery company that claimed they had outstanding balances on their accounts. The messages addressed each customer by name and included details held by their former supplier. Ex-customers of other now defunct firms have also been targeted in a similar way.

If an energy supplier ceases trading, it will immediately be taken over by successor appointed by *Ofgem*. This new supplier will manage your account and act as the point of contact to check any outstanding demands or refunds. Issues about outstanding balances or credit should be dealt with soon after the change, not out of the blue three years later. Be very wary of any instructions to pay to a bank sort code and account number. Bank transfers are used by scammers because they are one of the least protected and least reversible methods of payment.

Criminals are also targeting households that have prepayment meters. They are forging prepayment meter keys with, for example, £100 of credit and then selling them door-to-door for just £50, effectively offering half-price energy. The criminals even pose as official energy company employees.

It can seem like a good deal but it will backfire months or even years later. Eventually your supplier will discover that you are not paying them for your energy and will demand payment of the arrears at the full price.

A variety of government energy-efficiency initiatives have come and gone in recent years, such as the Green Homes Grant which offered vouchers for installing insulation, heat pumps and other home improvements. Although most of these have closed, fraudsters still use cold calling, doorstepping and online adverts to impersonate them. You could find yourself handing over personal details and cash to trades-people who never turn up or do a shoddy job without you ever getting the promised grant.

It is not always easy to avoid the crooks and you should always do your homework. Never sign up to anything on the strength of an unexpected doorstep encounter or cold call. If you want work done, start the process yourself. Ask friends and neighbours and read online reviews to find reputable tradespeople near you.

Get written quotes and study the T&Cs carefully. Pay with a credit or debit card or PayPal, rather than bank transfer. Consult your local authority's website for reliable information about any green schemes operating in your area.

Never engage with or purchase goods or services from doorstep traders, as you will probably find it hard to find them again if you have problems with your purchase.



Our Stall at
the 2022
Birstall Gala