

Scams and swindles **2**



**Still not
enough
protection
for older
people!**

**Inside: what needs
to happen next**

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Introduction



By Mike Hedges AM
Chair Cross Party Group on
Older People and Ageing,
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Scams and swindles are amongst the cruellest of crimes and have moved from Dutch auctions and the three card trick to highly organised criminal gangs preying on individuals.

Anyone can be the victim of a scam or a swindle, it is not just older people although those suffering from the early onset of dementia and the lonely can be amongst the most vulnerable.

Scams and swindles have gone on for many years, where the older and vulnerable have been taken advantage of. I remember as a child people coming around “offering” to carry out gardening work at highly inflated prices. There are still those going around “offering” to do unnecessary work on the roof for highly inflated prices.

As with many things technology has made the problem worse and it has made the work of the scammers much easier.

Now highly individualised letters are word processed and sent to people who they believe will be taken in by the offer of prizes or the opportunity to buy goods at unbelievably low prices. Lists of the names and addresses of the vulnerable are circulated and sold by scammers so others can also take advantage of those who have been tricked once.

Of course the Internet makes scamming easy from the sale of tablets, through to on line “girlfriends” or “boyfriends” who just need money to escape from their country and come to visit here.

I am pleased to support the work of Age Cymru in this campaign against scammers. Finally the old adage of if something looks too good to be true then it almost certainly is.

Executive summary

When Age Cymru launched the Scams and swindles campaign in 2013 virtually all other campaigns to reduce scams against older people focused on awareness raising.

There were many who thought there was no other way.

Another misconception was that scams were simply a civil matter in which an unlucky individual was conned out of some money rather than being seen as a crime in which the most vulnerable are targeted and robbed by the most ruthless, sometimes resulting in devastation for the victim.

The central theme of our campaign is older and vulnerable people **urgently need stronger protection against scams** through the creation of barriers between them and the criminals who seek to exploit them.

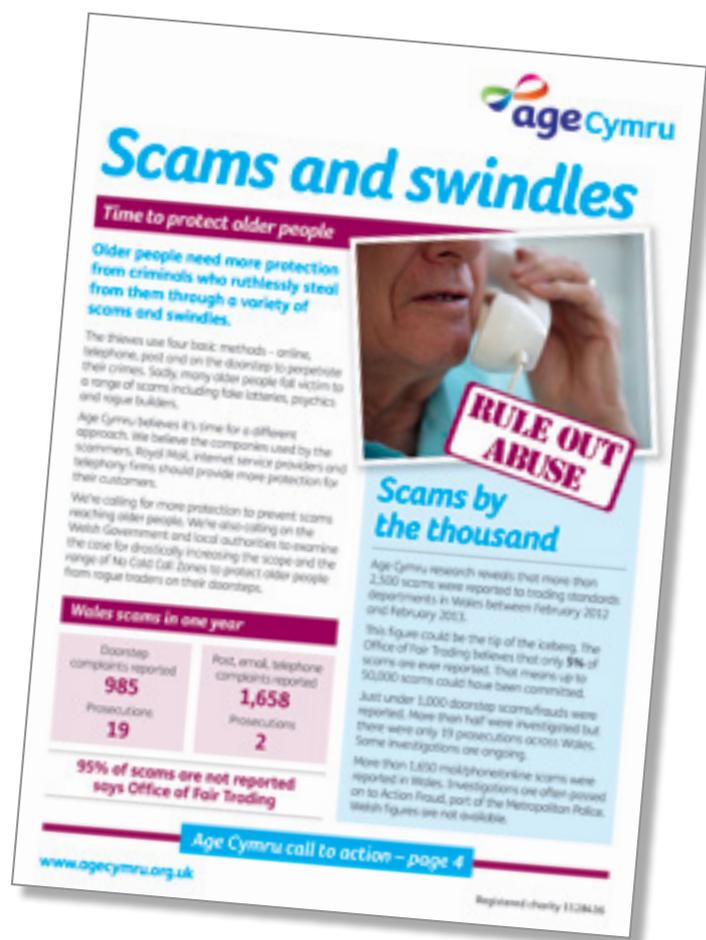
Since the start of Scams and swindles we have highlighted ways in which public and private sector organisations can better protect vulnerable people by making small changes to the way they operate.

In this updated report we repeat, with even greater urgency, that **new protections must be introduced** to reduce the numbers of older people whose lives are ruined by scammers.

‘Each organisation in Wales that interacts with older and vulnerable people needs to try to find ways of making them safer from theft and exploitation.’

While there has been some progress, an estimated £10bn is still being stolen each year by criminals using scam frauds or doorstep crime – much of it from the most vulnerable people in society.

Fortunately the issue is now much higher up the political agenda than it was in 2013 but it is now



time to translate words into action. For this reason we strongly support our sister charity Age UK's call for a scams task force to better coordinate UK policy.

But we also want to see Wales leading the way in protecting its citizens.

Each organisation in Wales that interacts with older and vulnerable people needs to try to find ways of making them safer from theft and exploitation.

And people who deliberately prey on older people because of their vulnerability should be subject to similar sanctions to criminals who commit other forms of hate crime.

We believe all organisations can play a role in making it harder for criminals to exploit or scam their customers and the wider public. In addition to raising awareness of the dangers of scams we should all be looking to increase the protections we provide to vulnerable people.

Our progress so far

Age Cymru's Scams and swindles campaign has been running since 2013.

During that time we have continually lobbied politicians and other decision makers to accept the case that awareness raising alone is not enough to protect older and vulnerable people from attacks by scammers.

As important as educating and informing the public about scams is, it is even more vital to introduce new or enhanced protections that actually build barriers between scammers and their intended victims.

'Removing the stigma of being a scam victim will be another important step in the complex process of bringing justice to scam victims.'

We are happy to say progress has been made. Politicians in Wales and Westminster have added their voices to ours in calling for tighter controls on doorstep cold calling, scam mail and nuisance telephone calls. Political debate on the issues has been seen in the Assembly in Cardiff and in the Houses of Parliament.

Thanks to positive action by Royal Mail some victims of mail scams are now being identified to agencies such as social services, police and trading standards who can offer help and support.

Age Cymru has formed partnerships and working relationships with a range of organisations

committed to improving the situation, such as Operation Liberal, the national doorstep crime hub; the National Scams Hub; the charity Think Jessica; the Advertising Standards Authority, police forces and many more.

We have been instrumental in forming a new group called the Wales Against Scams Partnership (WASP) jointly with the Older People's Commissioner for Wales. WASP's mission is to make Wales a hostile place for scammers and drive through increased prevention of scams across the country.

But there is still a long way to go. The old Office of Fair Trading claimed in 2008 that losses to scams were £3.5bn in the UK that year. The National Fraud Authority and other agencies now position the annual losses closer to £10bn – a tripling in only seven years. These are only estimates because only a small fraction of scams are reported.

Most scam victims still endure their ordeal privately due to shame, intimidation or a perception that the authorities cannot help them. Many would rather suffer in silence rather than admit they fell for a scam. **It is estimated only five percent of scams are reported.**

Removing the stigma of being a scam victim will be another important step in the complex process of bringing justice to scam victims.

In the pages that follow we reinforce the case for greater protection and point the way to all organisations, public and private, playing their part.

Recent research found 53 percent of people aged 65+ believe they've been targeted by fraudsters. While only one in 12 responded to the scam, 70 percent of people of all age groups who did respond said they had personally lost money.

Age Cymru's **TOP TEN TIPS** to avoid scams:



- 1** Never buy anything instantly on the doorstep, even if you are pressured.
- 2** Never give unknown callers your financial details such as your bank account or credit card number.
- 3** The police and banks will never ask for your financial details by e-mail or on the phone. If someone does it is probably a scam.

- 4** Never believe direct marketing letters that claim you have won a fortune.



- 5** Don't be conned by hard luck letters or e-mails from abroad.

- 6** Never hand over credit cards, bank details or cash to 'couriers'.

- 7** Use only reputable local traders for work on the house or garden.

- 8** Don't fall for lonely hearts scammers – they want cash not love.

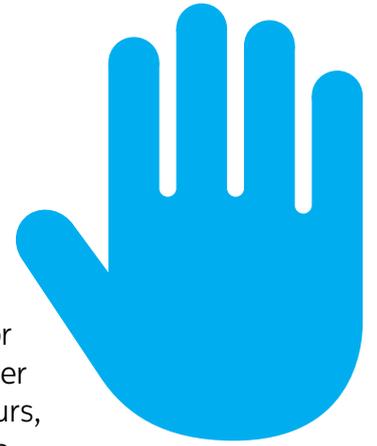
- 9** Avoid investment 'opportunities' from cold callers, especially by phone.

- 10** Beware of strange e-mails from friends or family asking for money urgently. Their accounts may well have been hacked.



Age Cymru Advice 08000 223 444

Why can't Wales have more No Cold Calling Zones?



We have asked this question constantly since the launch of Scams and swindles.

No Cold Calling Zones (or cold calling control zones) are designated areas that cold callers are asked to keep out of. Signage tells them the vast majority of residents do not want to be cold called, especially by people offering home improvement work or selling goods and services on the doorstep.

The zones are not intended to keep out well-known reputable local traders who perform a valued service, such as milkmen or window cleaners. Nor do they prohibit contact from a range of different people such as politicians or meter readers.

Zones give residents more confidence



Whilst they do not have any special legal power, it is generally accepted that zones give residents more confidence in dealing with callers who ignore the signage and knock on the door.

There is also evidence when residents are part of a zone they look out for each other, especially older and vulnerable neighbours, and report cold callers to the police or trading standards.

There are more than 1.3 million households in Wales but only 53,000 are covered by No Cold Calling Zones. This has risen over the past 18 months from the 35,000 homes that were covered in 2013, in part due to time limited Welsh Government funding for setting them up, but still represents only a small percentage – about seven percent – of total households.

So why does Wales have so few No Cold Calling Zones?

There is little or no political opposition to creating more zones in Wales and increasing the number of zones was part of the Welsh Government's Programme for Government in 2011. Many AMs have thrown their weight behind our call to drastically increase the scope and scale of zones and Mike Hedges AM, the chair of the Cross Party Group on Older People and Ageing, has called for the whole of Wales to be designated a No Cold Calling Zone.

We believe it is the process for creating zones that is the problem. It is expensive and time consuming for trading standards to carry out the investigation and consultation needed to conform to the guidelines for creating new zones. But these guidelines were created nearly a decade ago by the now defunct Office of Fair Trading.

Since then the commercial world and consumer behaviour have changed radically with online shopping and social media now commonplace. Major companies have found cold calling and high pressure selling techniques are counterproductive and have changed their practices. This means people continuing to do so are more likely to be scammers, or risk being seen as such.

As a result we feel the guidelines for creating new zones are no longer fit for purpose and need revising.

Our research indicates the vast majority of consumers do not want to be cold called at their homes and even larger numbers of older people favour a complete ban.

‘Quite simply Wales needs to go it alone. At present responsibility for the guidelines is deemed to belong to the UK Government. But we do not see why this should be.’

Yet local authorities are currently obliged to go through a lengthy and expensive process before setting up a zone and many, driven by a need to reduce costs, simply prioritise other things. This, in our view, leaves older and vulnerable people exposed to being cold called by potentially ruthless

rogue traders who are often part of organised criminal gangs.

Quite simply Wales needs to go it alone. At present responsibility for the guidelines is deemed to belong to the UK Government. But we do not see why this should be.

Responsibility for local government in Wales rests with the Welsh Government and the creation of No Cold Calling Zones is a local government responsibility.

Given local government funding also comes from the Welsh Government we see no sensible reason why the Welsh Government should not decide policy on the protection of older and vulnerable people in Welsh homes.

When powers are devolved we believe the guidelines should be revised to remove the time consuming need to consult with all residents before establishing new No Cold Calling Zones, which it has been shown the vast majority of people support.

According to analysis of victim impact surveys by the National Trading Standards National Tasking Group in England and Wales (with newly identified victims since January 2014):

85 percent of victims were aged 65+, 59 percent were 75+, and 18 percent were aged 80 to 84.

62 percent lived alone.

63 percent had a physical impairment, 43 percent a sensory impairment, 15 percent a mental health condition, 14 percent a cognitive impairment, and 35 percent had a long standing illness.

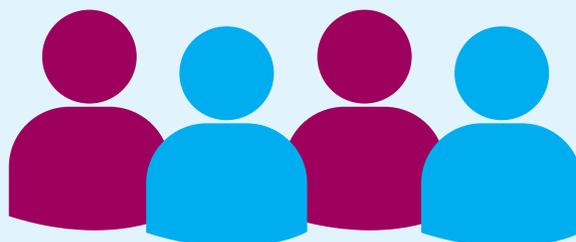
24 percent had concerns about their memory, or their family or carers had such concerns.

33 percent had experienced bereavement in the past two years.

36 percent had experienced depression in the past six months.

37 percent missed having people around and 40 percent were lonely.

9 percent were known to be repeat victims.



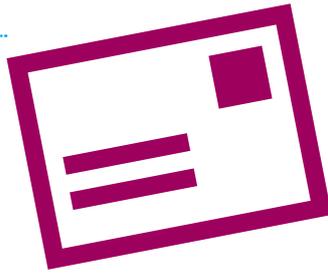
Misleading or dishonest? Direct marketing messaging

Age Cymru believes much of the direct marketing sent through the post deliberately targets older and vulnerable people.

It is important to differentiate out-and-out scam mail, such as fake Euro lottery wins, from the misleading direct marketing mail that operates at the edge of the moral compass but just within the law.

This includes mail which suggests recipients have won large amounts of money out of the blue. It often comes from catalogue companies who try to entice so-called winners to sign up to claim their 'prizes' and to give their financial details or pay a 'registration' fee.

'Sadly the law does not support the victims because the marketing companies ensure they stay just inside the letter of the law, often by using complicated and extremely small disclaimers.'



We believe this kind of marketing is deceitful and should be outlawed. It is designed to deliberately mislead and to take advantage of the most vulnerable. Unfortunately some older people are tricked into believing they have won large prizes and duly send in money or give credit card details.

Not only can this lead to money being taken from their cards on a regular basis but can also result in



Direct marketing rules should be tightened

them receiving ever increasing amounts of dubious mail as their personal details are sold on to other similar companies.

Much of this kind of mail originates abroad, but is given credibility by so called fulfilment houses in the UK. These are the UK addresses where victims send their money. Sadly the law does not support the victims because the marketing companies ensure they stay just inside the letter of the law, often by using complicated and extremely small disclaimers.

Lawmakers need to look at the way these companies operate with a view to amending the law, but in the short term Age Cymru would like to see firms forced to produce clearer, transparent materials and to cease the practice of pretending that individuals have won fortunes in order to gain their custom or to con money out of them.

How we are helping people with dementia and their carers to beat scammers



Age Cymru's Scams Awareness Project was established in 2013 thanks to funding from Comic Relief. Its aim is to provide interactive preventative scams awareness sessions to older people, including people in the early stages of dementia and their carers.

In 2015 the project succeeded in reaching over 5,000 older people in six counties of Wales: Rhondda Cynon Taf, Merthyr Tydfil, Monmouthshire, Conwy, Denbighshire and Gwynedd. The sessions have been delivered to a range of groups including memory cafes, mothers unions, older people's forums and sheltered housing or assisted living complexes. More than 17 percent of participants have had some form of memory loss.

Feedback from the session participants has been highly encouraging

The sessions can be adapted to a variety of audiences including those

with physical and sensory disabilities. Participants tell us they enjoy the informal and interactive presentation style which makes the information easy to take in. All participants have been given a pack of information to take home which reminds them how to avoid scams and where to go to report scam attempts.

Recruiting and training excellent volunteers has been hugely beneficial for Age Cymru and without their input it would not have been possible to reach so many people. All the volunteers complete an enhanced DBS check and a two day training programme. They are mentored and attend regular networking meetings.

Many of those attending sessions had not heard about or did not use the mail and telephone preference services but stated they would now do so. There was little understanding of how criminals got their personal information and many did not understand how their details were sold to companies.

Nearly all those who attended sessions reported they will be much more careful in guarding their personal information and ensure they do not give out bank details in future. One lady in Rhydyfelin said: "I thought I knew about scams but after attending the scams awareness session I really do and I will be so much more careful."

92 percent state they can now recognise a scam.

97 percent feel they are more able to avoid scams.

96 percent say they now know what to do if they think they are being scammed.

93 percent now know which local service they should go to for help if they think they are being scammed.

For more information e-mail scamsawareness@agecymru.org.uk or contact our Safeguarding Team on 01352 706228.

Nuisance calls – action at last

Nuisance calls, which include a significant number of scam calls, are a huge source of irritation for many, and occasionally of distress for older people.

They can be broken up roughly into three categories: direct marketing cold calls from legitimate British companies; direct marketing calls from foreign companies – some of which are dubious; and scam calls.

Recent rule changes mean legitimate British companies are subject to stricter control than previously. They must not call anyone on the Telephone Preference Service, nor anyone who has asked them not to call.

‘The only way to protect vulnerable phone users is through stopping such calls in the first place.’



If they do call and cause anxiety or distress they can be subject to heavy fines from the Information Commissioner. Previously it had to be proved they were guilty of causing substantial harm before action could be taken, but the new lower threshold should mean companies take greater care about who they cold call.

Cold calls from abroad can be from the call centres of British companies but they are more likely to be scams. Our advice to older people is to put the phone down on any foreign call they do not recognise or expect.

Scam calls can come from home or abroad. They take lots of different forms but the common thread is recipients will eventually be asked for money or financial details.

A particular favourite among scammers is to pretend to be the police or a financial institution. Often they will claim their target’s bank account has been compromised and ask them to transfer their cash into what they describe as a ‘safe’ account. This is a scam and the money will be lost.

Or the scammers may ask the target to draw money out and hand it to a courier for safe

keeping. Ten different Welsh victims fell for a scam fraud in which the callers pretended to be the police on one day in 2014.

Other scammers will target the personal computer of their potential victim, claiming it has been attacked by a virus. They will seek to take control of the computer remotely. Once they have control they will not release it until a cash amount has been paid by credit card. Even when they hand the computer back it may have been tampered with, rendering private details accessible to the scammers.

Recent changes to pensions regulation seek to make it easier for people to draw out large sums of money from their pension schemes. This makes them attractive to scammers and the telephone is a key method for those promising attractive returns on what turn out to be useless or fake investments.

There are many more telephone scams, too numerous to mention. However, we believe there is a common solution. The only way to protect vulnerable phone users is through stopping such calls in the first place. This is where call blocking devices can come in, using technology to protect the phones of vulnerable people.

There are some excellent products on the market which take out up to 98percent of unwanted calls and we believe more consumers, especially vulnerable ones, should have the option of such technology as standard.

In many cases, instead of receiving this theft protection when they purchase a phone service, they are expected to pay additional money for a separate device to make themselves safe. Why is this?

There have been signals from the UK Government that it is looking at ways to provide devices for the most vulnerable, but no details at the time of writing. We believe all older and vulnerable people should have the option to receive them as part of their telephone package.

Unfortunately when it comes to scams the Telephone Preference Service, which aims to keep out nuisance calls from legitimate British businesses, is of only limited use so this extra protection is urgently required for vulnerable people.

Online threats – a growing industry



Online scams are a threat to the unwary

The online industry, one of the world's biggest business groups, needs to be more proactive in protecting its customers, especially the most vulnerable.

Some progress has been made in recognising children need to be protected from viewing unsuitable content and from being exploited or abused online. Some of the impetus for this has come from politicians and some from the public.

But little is done to protect other vulnerable groups, such as older people, from being abused or exploited by people who are more technologically savvy than they are.

Age Cymru believes more could and should be done by those who make fortunes out of internet commerce to ensure their more vulnerable customers are given as much protection as can reasonably be expected.

The anti-virus and firewall industry sells a range of protection levels, from basic to the most advanced. As a result online safety comes down to a commercial option and the knowledge and ability to pay for it.

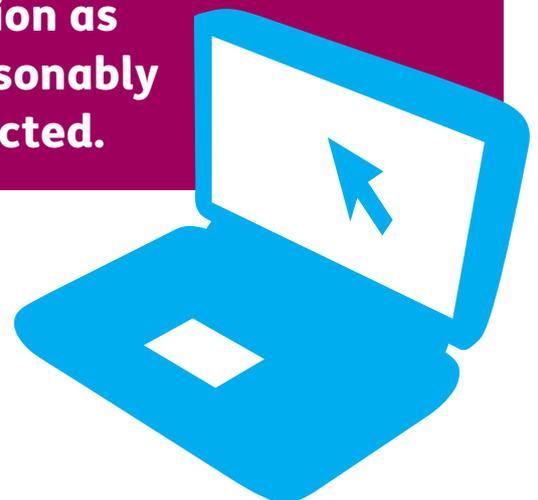
We know for millions the decision on protective software is governed by financial necessity and many people opt for the cheapest options which typically offer less protection or no protection at all.

Surely, given the impact of the multi-billion pound industry online fraud now is, it would be worth everyone, from government to internet service providers and software companies taking a fresh look at ways in which customers can be given more protection?

One way might be to offer more, free of charge, top-level security software. Or security software could come as standard when people purchase new devices. But there may be better ways to offer protection that can be dreamed up by the talented people who are employed by the online industry.

The Internet offers many benefits but it can also pose significant security risks. **Wouldn't it be great if older people felt safe to use the web and enjoy its benefits without worrying they are being robbed by criminals or targeted by unseen threats?**

Age Cymru believes more could and should be done by those who make fortunes out of internet commerce to ensure their more vulnerable customers are given as much protection as can reasonably be expected.



Justice and restoration

Scam victims, especially vulnerable ones, should be treated with the same level of care and understanding as the victims of other serious crimes.

This should mean that, in tandem with a police or trading standards investigation, they have access to advocacy, social services and financial guidance if necessary.

They should also be kept up to speed with the progress of the investigation and any outcomes.

It is also important victims are reassured they were not responsible for being scammed – the criminals were. There is evidence the majority (perhaps up to 95 percent) of scams are not reported because victims feel embarrassed or ashamed.

It is vital victims have the stigma of blame removed.

It is also important they are given additional help and protection to ensure they are not re-scammed. Sadly, the evidence tells us that after being scammed victims remain more likely to be scammed than other people.



In early 2015 representatives from police forces across the UK met to review the first ever economic crime victim care unit, which had been running as a pilot for four months (December 2014 - March 2015).

The unit was funded by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and set up by the City of London Police. It was supported by the Metropolitan and the British Transport police.

The background was an acknowledgment by authorities that victims of economic crime didn't always feel they had received adequate victim care. A small team of specialist advocates were established to support a group of victims who had fallen foul to fraud or other types of economic crime.

This team monitored what they considered to be the most effective interactions and sought the views of victims themselves, to see what type of care worked best for them. Surveys were conducted to evaluate whether the victims were able to benefit from the service.

One victim who was part of the project said:

“My behaviour has changed, I’m more dubious when the phone rings. It makes me think a lot more; is this genuine or not? I’m now more careful about committing myself.”

We hope to see the lessons of this pilot put in place throughout the country without delay.

WASP – a vision to make Wales a hostile place for scammers

The Wales Against Scams Partnership, WASP, was co-founded by Age Cymru, the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales and Trading Standards to lead the fight against scams in Wales.

Its vision is a scam-free Wales, a place that is hostile to scammers and where older people are actively protected against them.

We believe Wales can be the first of the home nations to develop such a commitment to the prevention of scams and a clear pathway to justice for scam victims and the restoration of confidence and safety for them.

WASP is currently developing a charter that will allow organisations to make a commitment to support the development of more protection for older and vulnerable people against scams and doorstep crime.

These can be private companies, such as postal services or utility companies whose employees have regular contact with the public. Or they can be public sector organisations, including national and local government, who have the authority to make changes that can protect possible victims.

The organisations who sign up will agree to look at their working practices and consider ways to implement changes that lead to fewer vulnerable people becoming victims of scams.



We believe Wales can be the first of the home nations to develop such a commitment to the prevention of scams and a clear pathway to justice for scam victims and the restoration of confidence and safety for them.



What needs to happen next

1 MPs and AMs need to be active in tackling the real damage scams are doing to older and vulnerable people's lives. They have the influence and the authority to lead a culture change that increases protection for older and vulnerable people.

2 The direct mail industry should be persuaded to end marketing based on misleading vulnerable people, for instance by giving the appearance they have won a prize while hiding the truth in the small print.

3 Foreign companies that send misleading mail to targeted older people with false or misleading promises should be prevented from using UK postal networks.

4 Telephony companies should make call blocking facilities available to older and vulnerable people to cut out scam and unwanted marketing calls.

5 The process of setting up No Cold Calling Zones in Wales should be simplified to allow local authorities to set up more zones at little cost in manpower and finance.

6 Better security software should be provided to older and vulnerable people to reduce the number of scam e-mails and protect from malicious websites. Software suppliers should have an ongoing duty to provide accessible safety tips to their customers on spotting scams.

7 Standard procedures for reporting and recording scam complaints and actual crimes need to be introduced, with clear contact information regularly publicised to older and vulnerable people.

8 Scams to be consistently recorded by type across the country to allow for a true understanding of the scale of the problem and benchmarking by both trading standards and police (and Citizens Advice Bureau if applicable).

9 Figures for scam types to be regularly published by both trading standards and the police for information and comparison.

10 Victims should be treated with standard levels of satisfactory care, including sensitivity, understanding and patience. Extra support should be available through advocacy, social services and financial guidance as required.

11 Victims to be informed on the progress of their cases and fully apprised of any outcomes.

12 A national scams task force to be formed by the UK Government and supported by the Welsh Government.

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