

Warwickshire Trading Standards Partner Update

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Car Used to Store Illegal Cigarettes Donated by Trading Standards

A car that was seized by Warwickshire Trading Standards has been donated to Warwick Trident College. The vehicle was seized because it was being used by a criminal gang to hide and store illegal cigarettes and tobacco products.

Illegal cigarettes are sold at pocket money prices and the criminals who sell them don't care who their customers are, making it easier for children and young people to buy cigarettes and get hooked on smoking.

The availability of cheap cigarettes also makes it more difficult for smokers to quit. The illegal tobacco trade has strong links with organised crime and criminal gangs involved in drug dealing, money laundering, people trafficking and terrorism.



Rather than see them go to scrap, Warwickshire Trading Standards has established a relationship with Warwick Trident College to donate vehicles to them for their students to practise their maintenance skills and boost their mechanical knowledge.

Do you keep poultry, racing pigeons or budgerigars?

For some time, keepers of 50 or more birds have been required to register

21-Year-Old Rogue Roofer Handed Suspended Sentence and 300 Hours Community Service after Defrauding a Kenilworth Resident

Rogue Trader repeatedly targeted Kenilworth pensioner, returning three times, and was only stopped after eagle-eyed intervention from bank.

A rogue roofer has been sentenced to 300 hours community service and 15 months in prison, suspended for two years after he repeatedly defrauded a Kenilworth resident of a total of £42,840 and nearly took a further £21,600. Warwickshire County Council Trading Standards launched an investigation and prosecuted the trader.

Louis William Gaskin (age 21 of Windmill Lane Balsall Common) who traded as Pitch Roofing Ltd, (The Crescent, Spalding, England, PE11 1AF) door knocked the home of a retired Kenilworth resident, claiming that he had been working on another house in the street and had noticed some loose tiles on the homeowner's roof. The homeowner allowed the trader to go up onto the roof and Mr Gaskin then claimed there were numerous loose and cracked tiles and said that the whole roof would need replacing, declaring that he valued his reputation and would not be happy doing a patch up job. The homeowner was given an estimate of £17,000 for the work.

Mr Gaskin began work almost immediately and on completion, presented the homeowner with a bill for £33,420, over double the estimated cost!

Mr Gaskin said the extra cost was because he had also taken down the chimney stack at the back of the house, which he said had proved a major additional undertaking. This was work the homeowner was unaware of and had not agreed to. The prosecution's expert surveyor later stated that the removal of the chimney should only have cost a few hundred pounds.

Later, Mr Gaskin returned to the property claiming that there was 'a problem with the VAT' and requested a further payment of approximately £9,250, which the homeowner also paid. This claim was false and simply an attempt to defraud the homeowner further.

On this visit, the homeowner told Mr Gaskin that water had been pouring from the gutters and soffits. Mr Gaskin went back up onto the roof and then claimed that there were 'bigger problems.' Mr Gaskin said that the guttering was not properly fixed to the soffits and the soffits were not properly attached to the batons. He further claimed that because the new tiles were heavier than the old ones, the weight of the roof was now bending the soffits. The rogue trader claimed he could fix these problems for a further £18,000, but he would not accept a cheque and wanted cash.



The homeowner asked Mr Gaskin what he should say to the bank to explain why he was trying to withdraw such a large amount of cash, and

them with the Great Britain Poultry Register.

However, keepers of up to 49 birds, including poultry and other captive birds (and pets), will now need to register them too. You have until 1st October 2024 to register, and you will be breaking the law if you don't.

You do not need to register psittaciformes or passeriformes (such as budgies, parrots, cockatiels and finches) if they are both:

- ✓ fully housed in a dwelling (your home or another indoor structure).
- ✓ kept indoors at all times with no access to outdoor spaces.



For more information, visit:
<https://tinyurl.com/4h28t9xd>

Rural Crime Workshop



Trading Standards Animal Health Team attended a recent workshop hosted by the Warwickshire Police and Crime Commissioner to discuss the impact of organised crime gangs and the hidden consequences global conflict has on the UK's rural communities. A significant portion of the discussion focused on the increasing involvement of organised crime groups in rural crime.

Trading Standards were delighted to be able to attend to discuss the crime issues they were investigating in rural Warwickshire.

The insights and feedback gathered during the workshop will play a key role in shaping the new Police and Crime Plan currently under development by the Police and Crime Commissioner, which will continue to place a particular emphasis on rural, wildlife and heritage crime. More information: <https://tinyurl.com/mrxuy7xe>

Mr Gaskin phoned his father for advice who told him he would just need to find a suitable explanation. The homeowner agreed to try and withdraw half the amount, £9000.

However, when the homeowner visited the bank to take the cash out, the bank was concerned and stopped him from doing so. Warwickshire Trading Standards was then called in to investigate. On hearing that Trading Standards were involved, Mr Gaskin left the homeowner's property abruptly, taking with him his tools, materials he had brought and his victim's paperwork.

Trading Standards Officers asked an independent expert building surveyor to examine the work. He stated that the roof tiles appeared to have been installed in such a way that they were defective and did not conform with current British Standards. He further said that there was no obvious reason why the fascias, soffits or guttering needed wholesale replacing and that the soffits were not subject to any undue stress or loading, something Mr Gaskin had claimed. The surveyor stated that the work carried out was so poor that he valued it zero! The homeowner was also left to pay another trader £3720 to carry out remedial work and fix the problems caused by Mr Gaskin.

Warwickshire County Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety said:

"This prosecution was necessary to protect the people of Kenilworth and Warwickshire. Mr Gaskin massively overcharged for the work he did, falsely claimed that work was needed when it wasn't and tried to make the homeowner pay a 'VAT bill' that didn't exist."

"I'm delighted however that Mr Gaskin was not able to hide from the law but brought to justice".

On sentencing Mr Gaskin, His Honour Judge Walsh said that the victim in this case trusted Mr Gaskin and that Mr Gaskin took advantage of this to massively inflate the quote he had initially provided for the roofing work. Further, the victim had also trusted Mr Gaskin when he (Gaskin) returned to his home to falsely claim that VAT needed to be paid and then go on to claim that more work was needed when this was entirely bogus, and no work was necessary.

In mitigation, Mr Balbir Singh of Equity Chambers, representing Mr Gaskin stated that his client was 19 at the time the offences and had admitted to them at an early stage. Further, he had not re-offended in the 15 months since then and his personal circumstances had now improved. He was married and in work as the sole breadwinner. Mr Balbir also said Mr Gaskin had paid back £36,000 to his victim, money he had borrowed from his family, a debt it would take him a long time to pay back.

At Warwick Crown Court on Thursday 8th August 2024, Louis William Gaskin was sentenced to the following, having already pleaded guilty to three offences under the Fraud Act 2006 at a previous hearing:

- A 15-month custodial sentence, suspended for 2 years
- 300 hours community service
- 25 rehabilitation activity requirement days
- A three-year Director Disqualification Order, and
- £2000 contribution to prosecution costs

For advice on protecting yourself from rogue traders and for more information about Warwickshire Trading Standards trusted trader scheme, visit our website:

<https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/doorstepsellers>