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Up to £1 where sold

Epsom pensioners lost £148,000 in fraud as laundering network sentenced

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Two elderly Epsom siblings lost around £148,000 after being repeatedly pressured into paying for unnecessary home repair work, as members of a criminal money-laundering network were sentenced at Guildford Crown Court.

The Epsom victims were among those targeted in a wider operation spanning Surrey, Essex and London between February and September 2019, according to Trading Standards investigators.

The case concluded this week with sentences being handed down to five defendants following a lengthy investigation involving Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards, Essex Police and the National Trading Standards Regional Investigations Team. Authorities said the network laundered a total of £331,223 taken from victims.

At the centre of the operation was Lee Cross, 54, originally from Romford, who was convicted of fraud and money laundering offences. Prosecutors said Cross provided banking infrastructure used to move and conceal criminal proceeds through numerous business accounts operating under different trading names, including “A-Z Repairs”.

Cross was sentenced to eight years and seven months’ imprisonment.

Others sentenced were:

• Sorise Richardson, 45, Romford – 12-month community order with rehabilitation activity requirement
• Zoe Hoskyn, 40, Hornchurch – two-year suspended sentence and 12-month rehabilitation order
• Jason Walker, 35, Blackburn – two-year suspended sentence and 180 hours’ unpaid work
• Pauline Walker, 70, Romford – 22-month suspended sentence

Trading Standards said victims were commonly approached by unsolicited callers claiming urgent repairs were needed to their properties. Homeowners were allegedly persuaded to pay substantial sums for unnecessary, poorly executed or uncompleted building works. Some were asked to fund equipment such as cranes and scaffolding that investigators said were never needed or supplied.

In Epsom, investigators said two elderly siblings were repeatedly pressured into paying for external works to their home that “didn’t need to be done”.

Amanda Poole, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Assistant Director, said: “Today’s sentencing marks the final step in bringing these fraudsters to justice, and most importantly, means the man at the heart of this operation — Lee Cross — will be behind bars.”

She added: “Today’s sentences are also a testament to the vital, diligent work undertaken by our Trading Standards officers, and those of our partners, in protecting our residents from harm.”

Lord Michael Bichard, Chair of National Trading Standards, said the case showed how organised criminals exploited elderly and vulnerable people, sometimes extracting “life-changing” sums for unnecessary or poor-quality work.

He said: “The harm caused by this type of fraud goes far beyond the money stolen, often leaving victims robbed of their confidence, independence and peace of mind.”

Trading Standards advises residents to be cautious of unsolicited traders, avoid agreeing to work on the spot, obtain multiple written quotations, and avoid paying cash or large sums upfront for building work.

Sam Jones – Reporter



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