

Warning: increasing risk of **fraud** *please stay vigilant*

Fraud is a growing problem for all of us therefore it is vital that you are vigilant and safeguard your personal and financial information. The increase in fraud highlights the growing threat posed by scams, as well as the growth in sophisticated online attacks such as data breaches and malware. Criminals are targeting customers directly, using scams to obtain personal information and in some cases transferring money directly to the fraudsters.

Current tactics that we want to make you aware of involve fraudsters researching property sales to identify buyers and solicitors managing the sale or hacking into email chains between a house buyer or seller and their solicitors.

The fraudsters monitor communications using malware that looks for keywords like *house purchase*, *deposit*, *buy* and *payment* and then once they have the information they need they make their move.

They set up email accounts very similar to the genuine solicitors and contact the client disguised as their solicitor's firm. The fraudsters communicate with the buyer usually through email and provide invoices and account details for payments to be made to or informs the client that the solicitor's bank account details have changed and give the details of the 'new' account for funds to be sent to.

Unknowingly, the client transfers their money to the 'new' false account owned by the fraudster, leaving the client at a substantial financial loss. Unfortunately, in these circumstances, the funds cannot be recovered because they are authorised.

At Hunt & Coombs Solicitors, our systems and technology enable us to ensure that the data we hold is confidential and secure. We take fraud seriously and have systems in place to help protect us, for example we have CEO impersonator tracking software in our email system. We have achieved and continue to maintain the **National Cyber Security Centres' Cyber Essentials Plus Accreditation** and will continue to strive to stay at the forefront in cyber security.

Advice on protecting yourself:

- **Don't feel pressured into changing any bank details.** If you receive an email stating a change in the bank details, you should ring your solicitor on a **previously used** telephone number. Hunt & Coombs LLP will not email you to tell you that our bank details have changed.
- **Check the email address carefully** and if in doubt phone your solicitor to check the information is correct on a previously used telephone number.
- Buyers and sellers should **avoid using public Wi-Fi systems to check emails when house purchases are being made.** Fraudsters can easily hack into vulnerable Wi-Fi systems.
- **Avoid sharing social media posts about buying/selling your house.** Fraudsters may get hold of this information and know the next step is a large financial transaction.
- **Check with your solicitor** before transferring money.

