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NEW GUIDE RELEASED TO GIVE PROTECTION FROM HOME-STEALING SCAMS

A new guide to help homeowners avoid property title fraud, where home ownership can be stolen, has been released today by the Fraud Advisory Panel, HM Land Registry and the Law Society of England and Wales.

Property title fraud can have a devastating impact and, though rare, can lead to people losing their homes.

The scam happens when a fraudster changes the registered details of a building to pose as its owner. The fraudster then applies for a mortgage or sells the property to an unwitting buyer and disappears with the proceeds.

In the financial year 2020/21 HM Land Registry received 22 claims for indemnity in relation to property title fraud and paid out £3.5m worth of compensation for these claims. People who own houses that are standing empty are particularly vulnerable to this type of fraud, as are properties which have a high value, are not mortgaged, or whose owners have recently died.

The guide gives people who own a property, or who are thinking of buying one, four steps to take to protect themselves from this type of fraud. These are:

- Ensure your property is registered with HM Land Registry. This creates an official record that can be checked by anyone who needs to confirm your ownership and gives extra legal protections. You can apply for voluntary registration if your property is not already registered.
- Keep your registered details up to date in case HM Land Registry need to send you official letters or notices, which could be early signs of fraud.
- Sign up to HM Land Registry's free online property alert service, which will give an immediate notification if someone tries to change the register for your property.
- If you're at particular risk of property fraud, you can apply for a restriction on your title so a conveyancer will need to formally certify any sale.

David Clarke, Chair of the Fraud Advisory Panel, said:

“Property title frauds are rare, but can have a terrible impact on victims and result in them losing their homes.

“By taking the simple steps outlined in this guide homeowners can take steps to protect themselves from property title fraud.

“Anyone who thinks they have been a victim of this scam should report it to Action Fraud or HM Land Registry.”

I. Stephanie Boyce, President of the Law Society of England and Wales, said:

“Property title fraud can have devastating consequences for victims, and we urge people to follow the steps set out in the guidance in order to help protect their homes.

“Solicitors are alert to this and other cruel schemes, such as payment diversion fraud, which can cost victims hundreds of thousands of pounds and even see their house stolen by the fraudsters.”

Julie Jenkins, Head of Counter Fraud at HM Land Registry, said:

“While fraudulent transactions are rare our state guarantee protects homeowners in the event they are victims of registered title fraud.

Our specialist counter fraud teams focus on detection, prevention and education, working with professional conveyancers, such as solicitors, to lower the risk of property fraud occurring.

Remaining vigilant is key to combatting fraud which is why we encourage all homeowners to:

- Sign up to alerts via our free Property Alert
- Follow the advice outlined in this guide”

The three organisations also urge anyone who thinks they’re the victim of property title fraud to report it immediately by going to www.actionfraud.police.uk or emailing reportafraud@landregistry.gov.uk.

The full property title fraud guide is available to read [here](#).

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About the Fraud Advisory Panel

Fraud Advisory Panel is the voice of the counter-fraud profession, committed to tackling fraud and financial crime. We aim to strengthen fraud resilience by championing best practice in fraud prevention, detection, reporting, investigation, and prosecution. We do this through education, advice and research.

Our members come from a wide range of professions and sectors but are united by their determination to counter fraud. This diversity gives us knowledge, experience and authority.

Founded in 1998 by ICAEW, the Fraud Advisory Panel is a charitable company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (charity number 1108863; company number 04327390). fraudadvisorypanel.org

About the Law Society

The Law Society is the independent professional body that works globally to support and represent solicitors, promoting the highest professional standards, the public interest and the rule of law.

About the Land Registry

HM Land Registry safeguards land and property ownership valued at £7 trillion, enabling over £1 trillion worth of personal and commercial lending to be secured against property across England and Wales. The Land Register contains more than 26 million titles showing evidence of ownership for more than 87% of the land mass of England and Wales.

Anyone buying or selling land or property, or taking out a mortgage, must apply to us to register:

- unregistered land or property
- any new owner of registered land or property
- an interest affecting registered land or property, such as a mortgage, a lease or a right of way

When considering each application, we use the law to decide whether and how it should be registered.