

Working together to fight fraud and cybercrime

As lawyers, we often deal with sensitive information and significant sums of money. Criminals know this, too, however, so we need to be extra vigilant to guard against the risks of fraud and financial crime, both online and offline.

This leaflet explains what safeguards we have in place to try and protect you in your dealings with us, and how you can help us to keep you safe.

Identity verification

All solicitors are legally required to check the legitimacy of their clients and the transactions they are involved in. This helps to prevent fraud and money laundering, and helps to protect you from the risk of scams.

Individual clients

As part of our “Know Your Client and ID” due diligence process we ask clients to complete and submit their identification information via one of our third party apps Legl and Thirdfort. You will receive separate information regarding this from either our Welcome team (this will be sent from our welcome@stephens-scown.co.uk email address) or from Stephens Scown Legl (sent from noreply@legl.com).

Please could you complete the identification process through Legl or Thirdfort as soon as possible so we can avoid delays in carrying out your instructions.

If you are unable, or do not wish to, complete the identification process in this way alternative arrangements can be made. Please discuss this with your lawyer.

You will need to complete the identification process before we start working with you.

Corporate clients

We need to identify and verify corporate clients and possibly the individuals who are instructing us. We can usually need to undertake checks against the beneficial owners of our corporate clients. We can usually carry out these checks via publicly available registers and using our search providers but you may need to provide additional information about specific individuals. We will let you know if this is the case.

Property transactions

There have been cases where lawyers have been instructed by fraudsters posing as the owners of property. These cases are not common, but fraud is on the increase. This poses a risk for buyers, who may find they have paid for a property that has not been “sold” to them by the true owner.

Buyers

Where we are acting for you in the purchase of a property, we cannot ourselves verify the seller's identity. Sellers' solicitors are required to carry out identity checks on their clients, but there is no guarantee these checks will uncover every fraudster. If we have any suspicions about the transaction, we will tell you.

We are also required to understand where any funds that we will be receiving from you have come from and how they were acquired. This may mean that we have to ask you some questions and may need to see some further documents.

Seller

If we are acting for you as seller, we will need to check your identity and satisfy ourselves that you are the genuine owner of the property you are selling. This may mean that we have to ask you some questions and may need to see some further documents.

We also reserve the right not to proceed with any transaction if we think fraud may be involved.

How we aim to protect you

At Stephens Scown, we take precautions to avoid fraud and keep you and your money safe and your information secure.

There have been numerous cases of fraudsters intercepting emails between clients and their lawyers and using the information to perpetrate fraud.

That's why our staff are trained in recognising the warning signs of fraud and we have set up an internal cybercrime group to ensure we keep up to date with developments in this area.

We take great care to protect and verify financially sensitive data. If we need your bank details, we will request them to be provided face-to-face, or via fax, post or encrypted email. We will not just accept a standard email.

Once we receive your bank details, we will telephone to confirm they are correct before using them. If we need to send financially sensitive information by email ourselves, we will encrypt the email.

If you need to send us money, we strongly recommend you telephone first to check you have our correct bank details. Always be suspicious of emails notifying you of a change of bank details.

We carry out checks on the solicitors acting for other parties we are dealing with. This may include a professional search called Lawyer Checker to verify the identity and the history of the solicitor and their firm.

On the next page are some tips provided by the National Crime Agency about staying safe online.

Top tips for protecting yourself from fraud and cybercrime

The National Crime Agency provides these eight tips for staying safe online:

1. Remember, no bank or credit card provider will contact you by email and ask for your personal and financial details online. If you receive a message like this, report it to your bank, then delete it
2. If you get an email from an unknown source, do not open it and do not click on any attachments
3. Make sure your anti-virus software is up to date
4. Never follow instructions from 'anti-virus software' you encounter on the internet. Only follow instructions from the anti-virus software installed on your computer
5. Install an anti-spyware package
6. Always use a firewall
7. Ensure your software is up to date
8. Never pay a ransom to 'release' your files if you suffer a 'ransomware' attack. There is no guarantee you will get your files back.

You can find more information on protecting yourself from fraud and cyber crime at:

- [National Crime Agency](#)
- [Action Fraud](#)

Or speak to your usual contact at Stephens Scown on 01392 210700.