

# **Avon and Somerset Police warning after fraudsters impersonate police officers in scam phone calls**

Avon and Somerset Police is warning the public to be vigilant after receiving multiple reports of fraudsters contacting people while posing as police officers.

People have reported receiving telephone calls from individuals claiming to be officers from Avon and Somerset Police. In reality, it is a criminal contacting a member of the public, using a 'spoofed' phone number to intentionally cover up their real caller ID and instead mirror the phone number of a legitimate organisation.

These scam calls may use AI technology, be automated or from a real person. Their main goal is to trick you into sharing personal information or to transfer money.

Often, the criminals will claim that the victim will be helping with an investigation by providing the personal or financial information they are asking for. In some cases, callers claim a suspect has been arrested and that enquiries have uncovered the victim's details among information obtained during the investigation. Victims may even be provided with what appears to be a genuine crime or case reference number to make the call seem legitimate.

It's believed that the purpose of these calls is to gain people's trust before attempting to defraud them. Victims may be told their finances are at risk and instructed to transfer money into a purported "safe account" or provide sensitive banking information to protect their funds. In reality, any such account would be controlled by fraudsters.

The callers are often extremely professional and convincing. Some victims have reported that the fraudsters appeared to know personal information about them, including details and nicknames that would not normally be publicly available.

Reports also suggest fraudsters can make calls appear to come from genuine Avon and Somerset Police telephone numbers. Some people who have attempted to call the number back have subsequently been connected to Avon and Somerset Police, leading them to believe the original call was genuine.

Amy Samotyj, a fraud protect officer at Avon and Somerset Police, said:

"These fraudsters are highly convincing and often sound professional. They may claim an arrest has been made, provide what appears to be a genuine case reference number and tell you your personal details have been found as part of a police investigation. They may even know some information about you in advance.

"They're using these tactics to build trust and create a sense of urgency, which can make the calls seem genuine.

"It's important to remember that fraudsters can spoof telephone numbers, meaning the number displayed on your phone may appear to belong to a trusted organisation when it does not.

"Remember that Avon and Somerset Police will never ask you to move money, transfer funds to a 'safe account', withdraw cash, purchase gift cards, hand over bank cards or disclose banking security information as part of an investigation.

"If you receive a call of this nature, end the call and independently verify who has contacted you before taking any action."

## How to protect yourself

If you receive a call from someone claiming to be from the police:

- Remember that fraudsters can spoof telephone numbers, so a genuine-looking number does not guarantee the call is genuine.
- Police will never ask you to move money into a “safe account”. This will belong to a criminal who intends to steal your money.
- Police will never ask you to withdraw cash, purchase goods, buy gift cards, or hand over bank cards to assist with an investigation.
- Fraudsters may provide a crime reference number, collar number or other details that appear official. Do not rely on these as proof that the caller is genuine – always verify with the organisation, using the contact details provided on their official website.
- Never share banking passwords, PINs, one-time passcodes or other financial security information over the phone.
- End the call if you feel pressured or are being told to act urgently.
- A genuine police officer will never object to you ending the call to verify their identity.

To check whether a call is genuine, contact police on 101 or, in an emergency, 999. Ideally use a different phone or allow time for the line to clear before making the call.

Alternatively, visit your nearest police station and speak to an officer in person.

Anyone who believes they may have been targeted is encouraged to report it to Report Fraud at [www.reportfraud.police.uk](https://www.reportfraud.police.uk) or by calling 0300 123 2040. If money has already been transferred, victims should contact their bank immediately.