

FROM: Lisa Butler (Police, Community Relations Officer, South Oxon and Vale

Thames Valley Police is urging residents to be on their guard amid reports of fraudsters targeting unsuspecting victims and convincing them to hand over large sums of cash.

In the past three weeks five people in Abingdon have handed over a total of about £25,000 in cash after being contacted by telephone by fraudsters asking for money.

The caller claimed to be a police officer, fraud investigator or bank employee. He convinced victims to withdraw cash by claiming he needed the victim to work undercover to expose fraud or because their bank account had been compromised.

Some victims hung up on the fraudster and then telephoned their bank to confirm this claim straight away. However the fraudster had kept the telephone line open so, even though a number was dialed, it was not connected. The victims were still on the phone to the fraudsters and were further misled by a woman falsely claiming to be from the bank who repeated the deception.

The victims were convinced to withdraw cash from their bank accounts, seal it in an envelope and hand it to a courier who called at their door later that evening. One woman was tricked into transferring cash into another bank account.

Another woman was also convinced to buy two Rolex watches from a jewellers and hand them to a courier.

The couriers who collected cash from victims were described as follows:

One courier was described as slim Asian man.

Another was described as Asian, in his late twenties, slim and less than 6ft tall. He spoke with an English accent.

Another was described as Asian, in his early thirties, 5ft 10ins and overweight. He was wearing a dark fleece with numbers on the shoulder.

Another was described as Asian, in his thirties, 5ft 4ins, slim, with short dark hair and a black beard. He was wearing a white zip up jacket.

Det Sgt Francesca Jarvis of local CID based at Abingdon police station, said: "We continue to work hard to prevent and detect offences of courier fraud across the Thames Valley.

"The offenders are very plausible and target honest and upstanding members of the community. Unfortunately they target vulnerable people, including the elderly.

“The more we can spread the word about this type of fraud the less success the fraudsters will have.

“I would urge everyone to remain vigilant and ensure you, your friend and family, know what to do should someone attempt this fraud.

“Take a moment to discuss it with loved ones to prevent yourself and people you know from becoming a victim of these types of scams.

“One of the victims was also told to buy Rolex watches and went to Goldsmiths jewelers in the Clarendon Shopping Centre, Cornmarket Street, Oxford at about 4pm on Wednesday 23 December 2015 and 10am on Thursday 24 December.

“She bought watches on the first visit and the man who collected them from her home was described as Asian, in his thirties, 5ft 4ins, slim, with short dark hair and a black beard. He was wearing a white zip up jacket.

“She may have been watched as she went to the jewellers and I would like to speak to anyone who saw anyone acting suspiciously in the area at these times to get in touch.”

- Your bank will never send a courier to your home.
- Your bank and the police will never collect your bank card.
- Your bank and police will never ask for your PIN.
- If you want to call your bank do so from another telephone.
- If you have handed over any details to fraudsters contact your bank immediately and cancel your cards.
- If you receive one of these calls end it immediately.

If you receive this type of call, report it to Action Fraud on 0300 123 2040, or via their website. In an emergency dial 999.

Anyone with information should contact Det Sgt Francesca Jarvis of local CID based at Abingdon police station via the 24-hour Thames Valley Police enquiry centre on 101.

If you don't want to speak directly to the police you can contact the independent charity Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111. No personal details are taken, information is not traced or recorded and you will not go to court.