



Anthony Browne MP
Anti-Fraud Champion
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United Kingdom

Dear Anthony Browne MP,

I am writing on behalf of Age UK in response to your call for evidence on the voluntary Fraud Charter. We are the country's leading charity for older people and have a significant interest in preventing scams and ensuring that when they do occur, there is appropriate redress in place for victims.

We commend the Government for acknowledging the critical issue of fraud, particularly fraud that originates online, which has become increasingly pervasive and sophisticated. Unfortunately, a large number of older people are victims of scams and fraud – our analysis suggests that around one in twelve (940,000) over 65s yearly – and it is imperative that the Government drives forward a strategy to reduce the occurrence of fraud and tackle it effectively when it does happen.

While the proposed voluntary Fraud Charter is a step in the right direction, we hold concerns that the voluntary nature of this Charter may not drive the necessary systemic change.

Scams and fraud affect people of all ages and backgrounds, and contrary to what most people may think, the likelihood of being scammed is generally lower in older age groups. However, the impact on older people affected by scams is often the most insidious, resulting in substantial financial loss and severely impacting confidence, trust, and well-being.

Older people tend to lose more money than younger people who experience scams. The consumer organisation Which? found fraud victims aged 65 and over reported losing more money than any other age group (an average of £2,697 compared with £1,731 overall). Women aged 65 and over lost twice as much as men of the same age.

Scammers sometimes target older people specifically and can exploit factors such as ill-health, dementia, social isolation, and a perception of increased wealth.

Managing money online

The high number of scams and the perception that online banking may not be safe means that some older people are increasingly reluctant to manage their money online. As reported in our recent report on banking, 31% of those over 65 stated they were “uncomfortable” using online banking, including over half of those aged 80+. Similarly, Santander has reported that around one in six (16%) of those age 55+ choose not to use their bank's digital services to manage their money, and among those over 55s who don't bank online, 64% blame concerns over security.

Previous Age UK analysis of internet use found that 39% of over 75s who are not online report that they don't trust the internet.

It is clear that the fear of scams is deterring many older people from using digital services, and it doesn't help that around 80% of fraud involves technology and social media.

Close encounters with fraud

Recent research commissioned by Ofcom found that nearly 9 in 10 adult internet users (87%) have

encountered content online that they believed to be a scam or fraud. And almost half (46%) of adult internet users reported personally being drawn into an online scam or fraud. In comparison, four in ten (39%) reported knowing someone who has been a victim of an online scam or fraud.

In addition, UK Finance says that £1.2 billion was stolen through payment fraud in 2022, and nearly 80% of Authorised Push Payment (APP) fraud, where a victim is tricked into approving a transaction, started online in the second half of last year, with about three-quarters of those beginning on social media. We believe the Government should do more to hold communications providers and tech firms accountable for fraud that originates on their platforms, for example, by introducing an appropriate levying system. This economic responsibility would incentivise these organisations to invest in more robust, innovative anti-fraud measures, thereby securing their platforms for all users, particularly older people.

Action against fraud

It is unreasonable to expect older individuals to be in a constant state of high alert against fraud. Instead, the Government should concentrate its efforts on stopping fraud attempts from reaching people before the criminals behind them can cause harm to a victim. The Government should learn from previous actions to fix this issue. For example, with APP fraud, the voluntary code did not work as intended, with a lack of consistency in customer outcomes and a lack of clarity for signatories in how they should implement it. We strongly believe that the Government should go further and make tech companies partially responsible for reimbursing victims of fraudulent content. The current system, whereby platforms are not liable for content on their sites until they are aware of it, is not currently working.

We have seen some positive examples of how focusing on outcomes and measuring them might enable the Government and industry to deliver their objectives for consumer protection, competition in the interests of consumers and market integrity. Financially incentivising tech companies in the fight to tackle fraud will support a collaborative approach to preventing and detecting fraud, namely by using technology and improved data-sharing across the fraud chain.

It is clear that failing to act will have a substantial financial, emotional and psychological impact on people across the UK. We urge the Government not to miss an opportunity with the Online Safety Bill and require tech and social media platforms to contribute to the reimbursement of victims of fraud if the scam originates from their platforms.

We hope you will consider our thoughts, and we look forward to working together to safeguard our society against the scourge of fraud. Our older population, who continue to contribute immeasurably to our society, deserve a secure and fraud-free digital experience.

Yours sincerely,
John Kamoto
Policy and Research Officer

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