

Tips on how to avoid Property Fraud and Email Hacking

The legal community has been aware of these issues for some time now and the majority of firms drum it into their employees that no matter how safe the firm's property firewalls/anti-virus or spam filters are, those of the public will probably be less so.

The Bold Legal Group has over 420 member firms throughout England and Wales and I have been highlighting these issues to my members, on a regular basis, for the last year or two. We have a compiled a few pointers for the public:

- If you receive the solicitor/conveyancer firm's bank details by email, and don't also receive the same details by post, phone the firm to make sure they are correct (using a verified landline telephone number).
- Do not send your bank details by email (to anyone), either phone them through or take them in.
- Make sure the firm acting for you is genuine by checking with the lists compiled by the Law Society or the Council for Licensed Conveyancers. Carry out a law firm search via the Solicitors Regulation Authority website. Read carefully anything sent to you by your conveyancers carefully. Many firms provide clients with their bank details at the outset (by post) and stress that those details will not change. Always telephone to check if the bank details provided appear to have changed.
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- If you are being pushed to proceed very quickly be careful, fraudsters often use this tactic so that emails are used and corners are cut.
- If you are buying an empty or tenanted property, tell your conveyancer and make sure they are 100% sure the seller is who they say they are.
- Ask the firm you are thinking of instructing what anti-fraud and cybercrime measures they have in place.
- Ask them what checks they carry out to ensure the buyers/sellers firm is genuine. Do they use services like Lawyer Checker/Lender Exchange/The Safe Move Scheme?
- If you have to send sensitive information by email do not give a clue to what that information might be in the emails subject line.
- Test your conveyancers account details by sending a nominal amount, say between £1.00 and £10.00 first, and then phone to make sure it has arrived safely.
- Do not post any updates on social media as to the progress of your transaction – this is how some fraudsters identify when to send the scam email requesting your money.
- Working with your conveyancer is a two way street. No matter how good and safe they are, if you are not as vigilant you may end up having your emails hacked or becoming involved in property fraud.
- Above all, remember that buying or selling a property is one of the most important and complicated things you will ever do. Do not instruct the cheapest firm to act for you. Visit the firm if possible. Certainly speak to the person who will be handling your transaction (or the Head of Department or Team Leader) and make sure you feel confident in them and their ability.

Rob Hailstone (Founder and CEO)

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Bold Legal Group

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