

13th February 2019

HSBC Encourages Islanders to #datesafe in the Face of a Rising Tide of Romance Fraud

HSBC is encouraging islanders to be extra vigilant when making use of online dating sites and apps so they can #datesafe this Valentine's Day, in the face of a rising tide of 'romance fraud'.

Romance fraud is when someone creates a fake identity - a 'catfish' - to enter into a relationship with a victim with the intent to steal either funds or personal information. According to HSBC's Fraud Team, although the number of reported romance fraud cases they dealt with in Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man last year was small, the total amount at stake is large – in 2018 a total of more than £138,000 was lost by customers in the islands.

Across Jersey alone, the States of Jersey Police Joint Financial Crimes Unit received eight referrals for romance scams in 2017 and nine in 2018.

Meanwhile, figures from the City of London Police show that 3,557 romance frauds were reported in the UK in 2017 with victims being conned out of a total of £41m, up from £39m in 2016.

As part of the Get Safe Online campaign, a joint initiative in Jersey between HSBC, Prison! Me!! No Way!!!, and the States of Jersey Police, the Bank is raising awareness around this growing area of fraud. In particular it is recommending five key 'DATES' tips, which it will be promoting across its website and social media platforms this month:

- **Don't** rush into an online relationship – get to know the person, not the profile and ask plenty of questions
- **Analyse** their profile and check the person is genuine by putting their name, profile pictures or any repeatedly used phrases and the term 'dating scam' into your search engine
- **Talk** to your friends and family about your dating choices. Be wary of anyone who tells you not to tell others about them

- Evade scammers by never sending money to, or sharing your bank details with, someone you've met online, no matter what reason they give or how long you've been speaking to them
- Stay on the dating site messenger service until you're confident the person is who they say they are. If you do decide to meet in person, make sure the first meeting is in a public place and let someone else know where you're going to be

Commenting on the issue, Chris Langford, Head of Retail Banking and Wealth Management, HSBC in Jersey, said: "For many people it can be convenient and fun meeting new people online and relationships can be formed very quickly. However, it's absolutely vital that people are clear who they are speaking to and look out for the warning signs.

"Figures show that romance fraud is a significant issue, but it is severely underreported – largely because people are embarrassed about falling victim to it. The reality is that it is a growing issue and can result in severe emotional distress as well as identity theft and financial loss. We hope our advice will help people spot it and prevent them getting scammed."

Detective Chief Inspector Chris Beechey of the States of Jersey Police, added: "Romance scams are one of the more targeted and despicable on-line crimes as they deliberately play on the emotions of the victim. We have received reports of a number of such crimes in recent years and would remind all such users of the internet to be as conscious and aware as possible of such activity."

For the full picture on how to #datesafe, visit www.getsafeonline.org/protecting-yourself/online-dating/.

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