

Three things have upset me this week.

First, I was told about someone losing £20,000 to a telephone scammer pretending to be her Bank. Second, one survey revealed that less than 50% of the population would seek financial advice and three, a survey by the Citizens Advice Bureau revealed that pension scams are massively on the increase with cold telephone calls on pensions taking over from PPI.

Now we can't do anything about the bank scam. If you release details of passwords or PIN numbers to anyone, despite the TV adverts and literature on the subject from Banks themselves warning you not to, then it is your loss, simply do not do it.

The other two in my mind must be connected: people not seeking Independent Advice and huge sums being lost to scams, the average loss is over £100,000 apparently.

The excellent survey by the Citizens Advice Bureau, on over 2,000 people found that despite 75% of them being confident they would spot a scam, almost 9 out of ten, when faced with three adverts (two scams one genuine,) chose one of the Scams. The two fake adverts offered high growth rates and free advice whilst the genuine one spoke of realistic returns and fees.

There are four main pension scams, accessing your fund under age 55, high investment returns often in offshore investments, a "free" review, and "free" advice.

Pension funds cannot be accessed by law under the age of 55. There are exceptional circumstances which are exceedingly rare but if anyone offers you the chance to get access to your funds it is a scam. It is also very expensive as not only could you lose your entire pension fund but you could get a tax bill of 55% of the money you have lost as a penalty for not obeying the law.

If you are tempted by offers of high investment returns in say Brazilian rainforest property for example, just stop and think why you should be offered this wonderful opportunity? All the scammers are trying to do is get your pension fund transferred to an unauthorised account normally offshore so they can get their hands on it.

Free reviews and free advice? All advisers in the UK are liable for the advice they give and must charge fees. Being authorised to advise and liable for that advice in future involves cost, so how can anybody legitimately offer "free" services? These are simply scams to soften you up ready for the big scam when they want access to your funds.

If you are thinking of moving your pension funds The Financial Conduct Authority has a helpful website; scamsmart.fca.org.uk to check before you invest but I have one for local folk. If you have not had advice from your own IFA about the potential move contact them immediately or call and see us if you don't have one. If the thought of paying reasonable fees puts you off just think what it would feel like to lose your entire pension fund!