

What role does the Charity Commission have in combating charity collection scams?

Part of our role as the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales is to protect and increase the public's confidence and trust in charities. In order to achieve this aim we regulate charities to ensure that they are carrying out their functions responsibly. We also raise awareness of those organisations that masquerade as charities in order to con people into donating money. Combating this activity is an important part of increasing the public's confidence and trust in the charitable sector.

How can my constituents identify collection scams?

There is a simple checklist to consider before responding to any request for cash donations – whether from a leaflet requesting donations of goods or clothes, or a charity collector in the street or in a pub or shopping centre.

- Is the collection for a registered charity? If so, what is the registered charity number? The name and charity number should appear on any material. This number can be checked using our online register at www.charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk or by ringing 0845 3000 218.
- Do they only give a registered company number? This only means that the organisation is registered as a business with Companies House, not that it is a charity.
- Is there a full charity name? Your constituents should be suspicious of vague wording such as 'poor children' or 'homeless people'.
- Is there an address and a landline phone number? Mobile phone numbers, or not giving a number at all, may mean that the organisation doesn't wish to answer questions and has something to hide.
- Can they say how much of the collected money will go to the charity and, if they are being paid to fundraise, how much are they receiving? New rules that came into force in April 2008 mean that people employed to fundraise on behalf of a charity need to say upfront how much of each donation will go to charity and what proportion goes to their wages.

If in any doubt they should not feel under pressure to give to that particular collection. Instead they may want to send funds directly to a charity of their choosing by searching our Central Register for a local charity to them or for a cause for which they have a particular interest (contact details are given in the section above). If they send donations directly to a charity this has the advantage that they can give in a tax efficient way, such as Gift Aid, which means that the charity gets even more money for their work. If your constituents have goods to donate they could take them into a charity shop. There are an estimated 7,500 charity shops in the UK. The Association of Charity Shops has a database of charity shops across the country so your constituents will be able to find a charity shop in their area (www.charityshops.org.uk).

What sort of behaviour is expected of genuine charity collectors?

Genuine charity collectors should be happy to answer questions and give more information. If you constituent thinks that a collection is genuine but is concerned by the behaviour of the collector then it would be helpful if they would contact the charity and let them know. If your constituent is not satisfied with the response from the charity they can complain to the Fundraising Standards Board. They deal with public complaints about fundraising activity (0845 402 5442 website www.frsb.org.uk). Most door to door collections for goods will leave at least two days after delivering leaflets before they collect any donations - this allows people plenty of time to check with the Charity Commission as to whether they are a registered charity.

What is the law?

If someone collecting funds, or a leaflet asking for donations, specifically claims an organisation is a charity when it is not then they are breaking the law and the police should be notified immediately. If a fundraiser or their material does not specifically claim that the organisation is a charity, but gives the impression that it is collecting for charity when it is not, this should be reported to the Office of Fair Trading.

In either instance the Charity Commission would like to hear about you or your constituent's concerns so that we can work in partnership with other organisations to combat scams and protect the good reputation of charities.