

Neighbourhood Watch Alert: Safer Internet Day – AI and Online Safety

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Safer Internet Day is a global event held each February to promote safer and more responsible use of technology.

This year's focus is Artificial Intelligence (AI) – how it's being used in everyday life, and how it can be misused by criminals. AI is now part of many online services we use daily, from social media and email filters to voice assistants and photo editing apps. While AI can be helpful, it is also increasingly being exploited to scam, deceive, and manipulate people.

How AI is being used by criminals

Criminals are using AI to make scams more convincing, faster, and harder to spot:

- AI-Generated Scam Messages – Fraudsters use AI to write realistic emails, texts, and social media messages with:
 - Perfect spelling and grammar
 - Personalise details
 - A sense of urgency (e.g. "Your bank account is frozen")
- Voice Cloning Scams – AI can clone a person's voice using short audio clips. Victims may receive a call that sounds like a family member, a trusted professional, or a company they recognise. Often used to pressure people into sending money urgently.
- Deepfake Images & Videos – AI can create fake but realistic images or videos of people saying or doing things they never did. They can be used for:
 - Fraud and impersonation
 - Blackmail
 - Spreading misinformation

Who is most at risk?

AI-enabled scams can affect anyone, but criminals often target:

- Older adults
- People living alone
- Those less confident with technology
- Community-minded individuals who are trusting and helpful

Simple online safety tips to share

Encourage neighbours to:

- Pause before responding – urgency is a common scam tactic.
- Verify independently – call the person or organisation using a known number.
- Never share on-time passcodes, PINs, or passwords.
- Be cautious of unexpected contact, even if it looks or sounds genuine.
- Talk about scams – sharing experiences helps others avoid harm.

How to report scams:

- Forward scam texts to: 7726
- Report phishing emails to: report@phishing.gov.uk
- Report Fraud: www.reportfraud.police.uk/

