



MP Factsheet

Charity collection scams

When might a collection for charity actually be a scam?

Your constituents may often be asked to donate cash or goods on the doorstep, whether answering the door to someone with a collecting tin, or being asked to buy a magazine 'for charity'. Increasingly, householders also receive leaflets or envelopes for cash, or plastic bags through their letterboxes asking for donations of goods.

The Charity Commission has received concerns from members of the public that not all collections claiming to raise money for charity are genuine. This factsheet is designed to help you and your constituents check that charitable collections are genuine, and identify and report scams.

How can my constituents check they are giving to a genuine charity?

There is a simple checklist to run through before responding to any request for cash donations, whether it is made in a leaflet requesting donations of goods or clothes, or by a charity collector in the street, 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. These can be checked against the online Register available on the Charity Commission website: www.charitycommission.gov.uk
- Does the collection 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 a full charity name given? Your constituents should be suspicious of collections for vague causes such as 'poor children' or 'homeless people'.
- Is there an address and landline telephone number? If an organisation only provides a mobile phone number, or no number at all, this may mean it does not want to answer questions, or has something to hide.
- Can the collector say how much of the donated money will go to the charity and, if they are being paid to fundraise, how much are they receiving? People employed to fundraise on behalf of a charity must be able to say upfront how much of each donation will go to charity and what proportion goes towards their wages.

How should charity collectors treat your constituents?

Genuine charity collectors should be happy to answer questions and give further information. If your constituent feels that a collection is genuine but is concerned by the behaviour of the collector, then they should contact the charity directly. If your constituent is not satisfied with the response from the charity, they can complain to the Fundraising Standards Board, which deals with complaints about fundraising activity. They can be contacted on 0845 402 5442 or via their website: www.frsb.org.uk.

Most door-to-door collections for goods will leave at least two days between delivering leaflets and calling to collect any donations. This allows people plenty of time to check with the Charity Commission whether the organisation is a registered charity.

My constituent is suspicious of a charity collection. What should they do?

If someone collecting funds, or a leaflet asking for donations, specifically claims that 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, they should be reported to the Office of Fair Trading's Consumer Direct service: www.consumerdirect.gov.uk/watch_out

In either instance, your constituent should report their concerns to the Charity Commission so that we can work with other organisations to combat scams and protect the good reputation of charities.

What if a collector is working for a genuine charity but my constituent disapproves of a particular method of fundraising?

Some methods of fundraising (for example face-to-face fundraising, or approaching the public in the street) can make people feel uncomfortable. If your constituent isn't happy about a particular method of fundraising, or is concerned about the behaviour of a collector, they should complain to the charity directly. All charities should have open and accessible complaints procedures to deal with these issues.

If your constituent isn't satisfied with the charity's response, they should contact the Public Fundraising Regulatory Association (PFRA) on 020 7401 8452 or via their website: www.pfra.org.uk

How can my constituent donate to charity with confidence?

If in any doubt, no one should feel under pressure to give to a particular collection. Instead, your constituent may wish to send funds directly to a charity of their choosing. They can search the Register to find local charities or charities linked to causes of personal interest to them.

Sending donations directly to a charity has the advantage of benefiting from Gift Aid, which means that the charity receives even more money to go towards their work. If your constituent wishes to donate goods, they can 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:

www.charityshops.org.uk

Our senior staff are always happy to meet with parliamentarians to brief them on an issue, to address specific concerns, or to discuss the work of the Charity Commission generally. If such a meeting would be useful to you, contact our Public Affairs Manager, Jack Rowley, by telephone on 020 7674 2322 or by email at jack.rowley@charitycommission.gsi.gov.uk