

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024033408755 A "serial predatory fraudster" pretended to be a police officer and solicitor to con domestic abuse victims, a court has heard. Stephen Davey, 49, was jailed for four years for four fraud offences and a charge of theft at Liverpool Crown Court on Thursday. Judge Robert Warnock said: "He is a serial predatory fraudster, over a long period of time, throughout the country, targeting females." Sentencing Davey, he said: "The time has come for you to stop committing fraud and causing so much harm to others." Davey, who has previously committed 57 fraud offences and 33 theft-related offences, has been described as "one of Britain's most heartless love rats" in tabloid newspapers in the past. The court heard he contacted his two most recent victims, who cannot be named for legal reasons, through a woman who he met in a Liverpool bar. He told the woman his name was Stephen Burns and he was a police officer and probation officer. Nardeen Nemat, prosecuting, said the woman asked him to help her friends, who were both going through family court proceedings following abusive relationships, and he offered to put them in touch with a solicitor named Simon Davey, who did not exist. The court heard one victim lost about £8,000 to Davey. As well as paying him false legal fees, she paid for items including a television and PlayStation and gave him more than £400 for private health scans after he claimed he feared he had bowel cancer. The other victim spent about £400 on legal fees. Both victims, from Warrington, Cheshire, communicated with the bogus solicitor over email and were told by him not to attend family court hearings, Ms Nemat said. In a statement read to the court, one victim said she felt Davey had portrayed her in a bad light to the family court, social services and her children's school. The second victim, whose ex-partner had threatened to kidnap their child, said she felt she had been portrayed as "unco-operative" in the family court because Davey told her not to attend hearings. She said: "I cannot understand why he would put innocent children in danger and affect our lives so much." The court heard Davey sent fraudulent emails claiming to be from Warrington Borough Council and one from Merseyside Police Chief Constable Andy Cooke to back up his stories. Tom Watson, defending, said Davey, originally of Wandsworth in London, accepted the victims had suffered and was remorseful. Magistrates' court Most criminal cases are heard in a magistrates' court. The magistrates are usually people who live in the local community, sometimes called justices of the peace. There are usually three magistrates who are supported by a legally trained advisor. Sometimes cases are tried by one magistrate, called a district judge, who is a lawyer. Magistrates' courts are not as formal as the Crown Court, the magistrates do not wear wigs and only the ushers (court officials who keep everything running smoothly) wear black gowns. Crown Court Some cases are heard in the Crown Court. There are three situations where a case may be 'tried' at the Crown Court: Serious crimes Cases where the defendant (the person accused of the crime) has asked to have his case tried by a jury Magistrates may send a case to the Crown Court if they feel they do not have the power to set a sentence as severe as the crime deserves Cases at the Crown Court are tried by a jury. These are 12 people from the general public who listen to the evidence presented during the trial and decide if the defendant is guilty of the crime. The judge decides on matters of law during the trial, such as whether certain evidence is allowed to be presented. The judge also makes sure the trial proceeds in a fair way. At the end of the trial if the defendant is found guilty the judge decides the sentence for the crime (for example how long the defendant must spend in prison). He said because of his past offending "the internet follows him around". In an email shown to the court, the defendant's mother said: "He works hard and keeps trying to get on with his life but can't and I think it's unfair that he's unable to move on." Mr Watson said Davey was studying for a degree in criminology and psychology and had been volunteering with the probation service following his release from an earlier prison sentence in 2017, but was recalled to prison for 28 days in November last year. Detective Constable Laura Gilbert said: "Stephen Davey is a manipulative and despicable individual who has knowingly preyed on extremely vulnerable victims. "He is a career criminal whose only motivation throughout was to extort as much money as he could from his victims." Davey pleaded guilty to two counts of fraud by false representation, making articles for use in fraud, possessing articles to use in fraud and theft.