

Name: Alert ID: TMML2024038865665 A SERIAL fraudster who posed as a police officer and a solicitor risked vulnerable mums losing the custody of their children in order to con them out of thousands of pounds. 'Career criminal' Stephen Davey targeted women living in Warrington who were battling their ex-husbands for care of the kids in the family courts. Liverpool Crown Court heard today, Thursday, that the 49-year-old began to frequent Legends Sports Bar in the city centre in December 2018. There, he met a woman who was a friend of the victims – striking up a sexual relationship with her after telling her that he was a police officer and probation worker called Steven Burns. The conman offered to put one of his partner's friends, a domestic violence victim who was facing a custody battle with her ex-husband for their five children, in touch with a solicitor called Simon Davey specialising in family law. But this solicitor was in fact the defendant, who took payments purporting to be for representing her in court and in order to hire a private detective who would investigate her estranged partner. He later stated that his ex-husband was going to be arrested on suspicion of terrorism offences and possessing indecent images of children, and that he would be deported. Davey claimed he had won the woman full custody of her kids and a £45,000 compensation claim, but in reality nobody had been present to represent her in court. Between January and April this year, he took an estimated £8,000 from her – convincing him to give her money which he said he would spend on an engagement ring for his partner, but instead used to buy tickets for Liverpool FC matches. Davey took £500 which he said he needed for private health scans, claiming he feared he had cancer and that NHS waiting lists were too long. He also talked this victim into buying a laptop and case for £360 before asking to borrow the computer for work and never returned it, while a PlayStation 4 and television she bought for nearly £600 were pawned at Cash Converters. Another friend of the woman Davey had seduced was going through family court proceedings against her ex-husband. She paid the fake solicitor persona he had created £475 in order to apply for a restraining order against her former partner – who had also subjected her to domestic abuse – but no such application was ever made. The defendant even forged emails purporting to be from Warrington Borough Council's executive director of families and wellbeing Steve Peddie and Merseyside Police chief constable Andy Cook as part of his scam. None of the three women targeted by Davey can be named for legal reasons. Defence barrister Tom Watson told the court that his client had left school with no qualifications and had worked for the ambulance service, but was made redundant. Since 2015, he has been studying criminology and psychology with the Open University and had volunteered with the probation service. Davey had volunteered with the probation service and had hoped to gain employment in this area, but a job offer he received was later withdrawn. Mr Watson added: "He does accept that these victims have suffered as a result of what he's done and he does not wish them to suffer any further. "This court will look at his record and see something of a life of crime, and a life of a particular type of crime – he does not attempt to deny that, but seeks to give an explanation for his continued behaviour. "His criminal behaviour began when he lost his job and he couldn't pay his mortgage, and he turned to fraud – he got into a life of behaving like that. "He regards himself as having no worth, and his criminal record which has grown and grown is something which he is disgusted with and not proud of. "When the offer of employment was withdrawn he went off the rails and moved back into his old behaviour. "It sounds shallow and hollow, but he does offer his apologies to the victims in this case – he knows his behaviour and actions have had this impact upon them, and they are right to be distressed and upset. "Though he has a record that does him no favours at all, his remorse is genuine." Judge Robert Warnock handed Davey – who had only been released from prison for fraud offences in London weeks before he hatched his latest callous scheme – four years behind bars. Sentencing, judge Warnock said: "This was a concentrated campaign of fraud against two vulnerable women. "Shortly after you were released from prison, you targeted your two victims, each of whom were mothers to young children. "This case involves six young children involved in contested family court proceedings. "You created two false personas, purporting to be a probation officers and police officer as well as working for a solicitors firm specialising in family law. "Neither persona existed – you convinced them that you were working on their behalf, but you extorted money from them. "The real harm in this cause is the effect it had upon the cases involving these children. "You are an imbued dishonest fraudster who has been committing these kind of offences for a long time – you have a total of 94 offences with 17 convictions, starting in 1987. "Your modus operandi was extensive, complicated and nationwide. "The time has come for you to stop committing fraud and to stop doing harm to others."

Davey – who was also handed a restraining order banning him from contacting his victims for 10 years – is now due to face a Proceeds of Crime Act hearing in the New Year back at Liverpool Crown Court, where he could be ordered to pay back his ill-gotten gains. He is also barred from entering the Tune Hotel in Liverpool – where he stayed for nearly a year, but did not pay for his accommodation. The dad-of-two left his possession in his hotel after being rumbled by staff, with investigating officers discovering items including a fake police lanyard among other items used in the fraud. The fake police lanyard found in Davey's hotel room Prosecution barrister Nardeen Nemat said following the sentencing: "Stephen Davey is a serial fraudster whose behaviour showed a disregard for the havoc and heartache he created in the lives of the people he conned. "The women thought he was trying to help them with difficult family problems, yet he just made things so much worse. "By telling the women that his 'solicitor friend' was dealing with the family court matters and that they didn't need to attend court, he could have derailed their hopes of maintaining custody of their children. "His behaviour was reckless and heartless. "Thankfully, the women found the courage and perseverance to support this prosecution and help the Crown Prosecution Service build a strong case – so strong that Davey pleaded guilty at an early stage. "The Crown Prosecution Service would like to thank these women for their help in this case and wishes them well for the future." Detective constable Laura Gilbert added: "This has been a complex and wide-ranging investigation spanning multiple force areas. "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. "I would like to thank the victims and witnesses in this case for coming forward and exposing his predatory behaviour, and for the bravery they have shown in doing so. "They have played a vital role in Davey being brought to justice for his crimes. "When arrested and interviewed Davey completely denied the offences, and showed absolutely no remorse. "His offending showed significant premeditation and he attempted to cover his tracks at every turn. "I am pleased that this case has been brought to a swift conclusion for the sake of the victims and I hope that the sentence imposed will motivate Davey to reflect on his behaviour going forward."