



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE (ELMBRIDGE)

TRADING STANDARDS IN ELMBRIDGE

27 JULY 2009

KEY ISSUE

To update Members on the service provided by Trading Standards during 2008/09 and key activities related to Elmbridge.

SUMMARY

Trading Standards works towards the goal of helping consumers feel safe, confident and empowered when buying goods and services. At the same time Trading Standards works to support and educate reputable businesses and tackle rogue trading practices. This report describes the key activities of Trading Standards over the last year and highlights initiatives in the Elmbridge area.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) The Local Committee (Elmbridge) is asked to note the activities being undertaken by the Trading Standards Service and in particular the initiatives in Elmbridge.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Trading Standards Service is concerned with Consumer Protection and Business Regulation. It seeks to create 'Confident Consumers, Trusted Traders' (Trading Standards Vision Statement). We seek to tackle rogue traders and contribute to the reduction of crime and disorder in Surrey.
- 1.2 Trading Standards is a relatively small service, serving all 11 Districts and Boroughs within Surrey.
- 1.3 There are four front line service delivery teams:

Investigations – wide range of investigations under criminal and civil legislation using intelligence from approximately 2,400 referrals from Consumer Direct every month.

Safer and Stronger Communities – tackles doorstep crime, rogue traders and supports vulnerable victims. Works to prevent the illegal sale of age-restricted products to young people, including alcohol, tobacco, knives etc.

Health and Well Being – ensures that food meets legal standards and is honestly labelled and advertised. Works to facilitate and promote healthy eating choices. Works to ensure animal health and welfare and prevent animal disease outbreaks.

Economy and Environment – supports Surrey businesses providing information and advice to help them meet their legal responsibilities. This Team also runs the Buy with Confidence approved trader scheme.

1.4 The following are the top 3 issues for the service:

- Doorstep crime We need to work even harder to protect residents, especially the most vulnerable, enhancing prevention and also bringing more criminals to justice.
- Age restricted products – drive down illegal sales to young people - thereby contributing to a reduction in anti-social behaviour in communities and reducing the damaging health implications for young people
- Protecting residents and businesses from the impacts of the recession and the increase in unfair and deceptive practices, and scams, which develop rapidly at such times.

2. ANALYSIS

2.1 PERFORMANCE SUMMARY FOR 2008/09

- Achieved savings of 5% following a restructuring of the service while at the same time undertaking additional duties.
- Created capacity to carry out more Financial Investigations, recruiting an Accredited Financial Investigator to maximise the impact of Proceeds of Crime legislation in seizing and forfeiting criminal assets.
- Increased the focus on preventative approaches through the recruitment of a dedicated Education Officer.
- Continued the downward trend of illegal alcohol sales to under 18s (to 13% of test purchase attempts from 16% and 18% in the previous two years)
- Secured additional £2m in Government funding over 3 years to continue an innovative *Scambusters* project covering 61 local authorities across the East of England, the South East, and London.
- Continued focus on protecting elderly and vulnerable residents from doorstep rogue traders producing over £165,000 in direct savings for vulnerable residents.
- Increased the coverage of homes protected by 'No Cold Calling Zones' from 3% to 5.6% of households, and received extremely positive feedback from residents in these zones.
- Increased the number of Trading Standards Approved Traders in the Buy With Confidence scheme to over 300 businesses.

New responsibilities for the service relate to:

- The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 present new challenges and opportunities in our ongoing battle against rogue traders.
- Intellectual Property Crime – new duties to deal with copyright infringements.
- Food Hygiene and Primary producers and Feed Hygiene Regulations.
- Home Information Packs.

- Energy Performance Certificates.
- Consumer Credit and Money Laundering Legislation.
- Violent Crime Act (sale of imitation firearms, knives and tobacco)

2.3 LOCAL INITIATIVES

2.3.1 Buy with Confidence approved trader scheme

This was created to meet a need and in response to customer demand. There are over 300 businesses of which 16 are in Elmbridge. This valuable new service is now charging businesses for membership and as a result is moving towards being self-financing. A full list of members is available from www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk and is searchable by postcode.

A Buy With Confidence display was put up in the Dittons library from 28 April to 12 May 2009. A publicity article was recently included in the Weybridge Flyer.

2.3.2 Rapid Response to doorstep crime

By changing policies and procedures and working practices, and in building improved links with partners we are now able to respond immediately to incidents of doorstep deception much more effectively. (An update on rapid response statistics for Elmbridge will be given at the meeting).

2.3.3 No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZs)

A No Cold Calling Zone is an area in which residents have stated they do not wish to receive unsolicited visits to their homes (cold calls) from businesses. The zones are set up by Surrey Trading Standards working with the local Police and usually Neighbourhood Watch and the local borough or district councils. The main aim of the zones is to reduce the number of unwanted and uninvited callers to households soliciting services or selling goods, which in turn reduces the number of offences committed against Surrey residents.

There are currently no NCCZs in Elmbridge. However, there has been consultation on new zones in Claygate, Cobham and Hersham and these zones will be launched later this year.

Lists of roads to be included in the new zones can be found on the Surrey County Council website as follows:

Claygate

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/searchresults/73f5deaece7107708025757e0051987b?OpenDocument>

Cobham

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/searchresults/baeaa1627a2d9318025757e005566c4?OpenDocument>

Hersham

<http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/searchresults/3db617bf29add50d8025757e005611f0?OpenDocument>

The No Cold Calling Zone Launch for Elmbridge and the launch of the Claygate zone will be held at the Claygate Centre for Retired People, Elm Road , Claygate on Thursday 13th August at 11:30am.

The Cobham Launch will take place at Painshill Fire Station, Gavell Road, Portsmouth Road, Cobham during the Fire Station Open Day on Saturday 22nd August. We will have a stand at the event and you are welcome to come and visit us at any time during the day between 10am and 4pm.

The Hersham launch will be held at the Hersham Centre for Retired People, Queens Road, Hersham on Tuesday 29th September at 11:30am.

Information on how to nominate other areas for consideration for NCCZs can be found at the following site:

http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspages.nsf/LookupWebPagesByTITLE_RTF/Applying+for+a+No+Cold+Calling+Zone?opendocument

2.3.4 Underage Sales

We attempt to reduce illegal sales of age-restricted products such as alcohol, tobacco and knives, and as a result help to reduce anti-social behaviour and to improve the health and well-being of young people. This is achieved through sharing intelligence with partners, educating traders and engaging in nearly 400 test purchases using volunteer young people. In Elmbridge during 2008-09 we attempted to make 39 test purchases of alcohol and on 2 occasions sales were made to children. One test purchase of fireworks was attempted, but the trader did not sell to the under-age purchaser.

2.3.5 Food Standards

Good partnership working between Trading Standards and Elmbridge District Council has resulted in harmful Imperial Vodka being removed from sale from two premises in Elmbridge.

We have recently launched ‘Eat Out Eat Well’. This is an initiative to encourage restaurants and other businesses selling food to the public to offer healthier choices. Businesses that want to sign up to the scheme will be assessed by Surrey’s Trading Standards team and be accredited with a bronze, silver or gold award depending on their levels of hygiene and menu choice.

3. CONSULTATIONS

- 3.1 There has been consultation on the proposed No Cold Calling Zones in Claygate, Cobham and Hersham. More detail of the outcome is given at paragraph 2.3.3 above.

4. FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The service has 64 full time equivalents (fte) staff and a total budget of £2.59m. The overall cost of the service has fallen significantly in recent years with savings made in the Policy and Productivity Review, Business Delivery Review, and further efficiencies during 2008/9.

5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Equalities impact assessments have been carried out in relation to key areas of the Service that are customer facing. Advice and education about doorstep crime is provided to vulnerable groups. We continue to provide talks to local groups and associations representing a diverse section of the community.
- 5.2 The service has created the role of Vulnerable Person’s Officer from within existing resources to specifically address the needs of those demographic groups who tend to be targeted by doorstep criminals.

6. CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The main areas of service activity which impact on Community Safety include Under Age Sales and in tackling doorstep crime and deception.

7. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The service enforces legislation to minimise packaging and ensures the appropriate labelling of energy efficiency information on a range of products. Working with partners, the service monitors business waste disposal, particularly food and animal waste products.

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