



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE (Epsom & Ewell)

Annual report on Trading Standards

2nd March 2009

KEY ISSUE

The service provided by Trading Standards in Epsom & Ewell during 2007/08 and the challenges and issues faced in 2008/09.

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.

During the year the service became responsible for significant new duties from a wide range of government legislation whilst at the same time needing to make significant efficiency savings. This was tackled via a comprehensive review of the work of the service. The results of the review were considered and supported by the Safer and Stronger Select Committee and the Executive.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Epsom & Ewell Local Committee notes the initiatives being taken by the Trading Standards Service and the outcomes of the review of the service.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

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. Trading Standards is a relatively small service, serving all 11 Districts and Boroughs within Surrey.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY FOR 2007/08

Scambusters – additional funding of £1.95M has now been secured from government to ensure the continuation of this innovative regional project that tackles a wide range of cross border scams targeted at vulnerable people. The existing teams, based in Leatherhead and Chelmsford, and covering 61 local authorities will now be able to continue until 2011.

Buy with Confidence approved trader scheme. BWC is an approved trader scheme run by Surrey County Council Trading Standards Service. It is part of a regional scheme covering much of the south of England. Membership allows businesses:

- to demonstrate their commitment to fair, professional and honest trade, and
- to advertise that they are 'Approved by Trading Standards'.

Initially targeted at the home improvement sector, the scheme is now open to virtually all traders and enables residents to choose vetted traders they can trust either through calling Consumer Direct or a dedicated website. Full information on the scheme is available at www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk

Within Surrey there are now 301 members, 15 of these are located within Epsom and Ewell where officers spent a day promoting the scheme outside Wickes, Epsom on the 1st December 2008.

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. In this way during 2007/08 we received reports of 334 incidents and we responded to 80% of them (some were historic and did not require intervention). 30 incidents were reported to us from Epsom & Ewell during the same period.

No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZ's)- in partnership with Surrey Police - Zones now operational in Guildford, Horley, Woking, Hooley, Bookham, Fetcham and Ashted. We are also in discussion with Elmbridge and Waverley. There has been excellent feedback from local residents and Police statistics show very significant reductions in distraction burglary. Residents' surveys demonstrate strong support and a reduction in the fear of crime. We are keen to develop further NCCZs in areas with specific evidence of problems and where there is strong local Police support.

Epsom and Ewell NCCZ is expected to be launched on 26 May 2009. It will cover College Ward, parts of Nonsuch, Ewell and Town Ward. The consultation process has started and will continue until April 2009. More information and a list of Roads is on the County Website

Underage Sales - by working more closely with the Police we have been able to improve the targeting of premises. Although staffing issues have meant reduced test purchasing so far this year, it is proposed to focus more on Epsom & Ewell in the next year.

April 07- March 08 : 56 premises were test purchased (1 TP - tobacco, 2 TPs - knives, 53 TPs - alcohol), in total there were 4 failed test purchases all alcohol.

April 08 – end of Jan 09 : 15 premises test purchased (all alcohol TPs), in total there have been 4 failed test purchases.

Post Office Scales – a complaint concerning the zeroing of scales at a Post Office within the Epsom & Ewell area has been investigated and the Post Office management are ensuring that scales are at zero before use.

Epsom Derby Market 2008 – Food safety inspections were carried out and found to be satisfactory. Counterfeit leisure and sports clothing was seized and legal action is being pursued.

Healthy Eating – A healthy eating award scheme is to be launched across Surrey in March 2009.

Performance Indicators - Key Performance indicators are very positive, in the upper quartile for County Councils, whilst spending on Trading Standards is in the bottom quartile, demonstrating excellent value for money.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

The past year has seen significant resources diverted to address the Foot & Mouth outbreak. This clearly has had an impact on the normal functions of the service but we managed to maintain core services during the outbreak. Significant additional costs were incurred and DEFRA failed to refund our costs in dealing with the outbreak. During the course of the year DEFRA reduced its direct funding to us by 12.5%.

New responsibilities and hence extra pressures on the service relate to:

- Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations - present a whole new set of challenges and opportunities in our ongoing battle against rogue traders. By closing loopholes that had existed under previous legislation there is the potential to catch those who had previously avoided prosecution but the trade-off is the increased workload
- 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)

Other pressures needing additional resources

- Buy with Confidence – to encourage rapid expansion of membership
- Financial Investigations – to ensure that we recoup the Proceeds of Crime from perpetrators.
- Intelligence Capacity – to ensure we target resources as effectively as possible.

Review of the service - In order to address these issues the service has taken a number of steps to create capacity:

- Investigation and Intervention Policy – a new tougher set of investigation and intervention criteria will lead to fewer investigations, but they will be better targeted at the most significant problem areas and/or traders. Inevitably Trading Standards will be less responsive to individual consumer complaints.
- Quality System – allow accreditation to lapse and introduce a more streamlined system

- Food inspection and sampling – reduction of one post and food sampling and analysis costs
- Management – reduction of one team leader and reduction in number of operational teams.
- Animal Health – existing staff to absorb new duties in relation to food and feed hygiene work.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Overall cost of the service has fallen significantly in recent years with savings made in the Policy and Productivity Review, and then Business Delivery Review (reduction of staff by 12%), and further efficiencies being made for 2008/9.

CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

The main areas of service activity that impacts on Community Safety include Under Age Sales and in tackling doorstep crime and deception – both issues discussed above.

EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

Equalities impact assessments have been carried out in relation to key areas of the Service that are customer facing. Last year Trading Standards contacted local groups and provided advice and education about doorstep crime. We continue to provide talks to local groups and associations representing a diverse section of the community.

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.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

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.

CONSULTATION

There is ongoing consultation over the proposed Epsom & Ewell No Cold Calling Zone.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

Version No. Date: Time: Initials: No of annexes: