



**OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE
(Reigate and Banstead)**

**Surrey Trading Standards Service Update including:
Buy With Confidence Trader Approval Scheme
No Cold Calling Zones
Underage Sales**

For information only

8 December 2008

KEY ISSUE

Updates on specific Trading Standards Service Activities.

SUMMARY

The Buy With Confidence trader approval scheme was introduced in order to support other initiatives within Trading Standards. The scheme provides a list of traders who have been assessed and approved by the service, the list can be found at www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk or by calling 01372 371666. The membership has been growing since 2004 although slower since the introduction of a fee and in the current economic climate.

No Cold Calling Zones are developed in partnership with the Police and work towards a goal of helping consumers feel safe. One of the main areas of responsibility for the Services Community Safety Team is tackling the problem of doorstep crime, (often also linked to distraction burglary) particularly the Cold Calling activities of home maintenance traders. No Cold Calling Project was proposed as a way to give cold callers a clear indication that they are not welcome. The initial No Cold Calling project commenced in areas of Guildford in September 2005.

Underage Sales

Officers within the service also undertake enforcement activities around underage sales, which is either intelligence led or project based. Two of the team

contribute full time to working in partnership with Surrey Police tackling the sale of age-restricted products, mainly alcohol.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper is forwarded for information and update only. The Local Committee Reigate and Banstead is asked to agree that:

- (i) They continue to support the development of the Buy With Confidence Trader Approval Scheme by Surrey Trading Standards Service.
- (ii) The No Cold Calling Zones initiative is continued and expanded through Reigate & Banstead as interest and resources allow.
- (iii) Where possible Trickster should be used in promoting new NCC areas and sending out the message effectively.
- (iv) The Community Safety Team continues to be represented at relevant community safety meetings / groups throughout Reigate & Banstead with the view to advising, encouraging and assist in setting up NCC areas.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Buy With Confidence Trader Approval Scheme

The service does a lot of work educating the elderly and vulnerable in relation to doorstep callers, disrupting activities of rogue traders and highlighting formal action taken against individuals or companies. This scheme gives the service the ability to provide an alternative “safer route” to support Surrey consumers in making a purchasing decision.

A membership fee for the scheme was introduced in April 2007 with an ultimate aim over the coming years, of reaching membership levels which can both support such a large geographical area of consumers and be self financing as an enterprise. The scheme currently has 299 members in Surrey of which are 44 located in Reigate and Banstead. The membership in the area has not increased recently, therefore at the time of writing a promotional event is planned for the 15 November outside Morrisons store in Reigate. This event is being accompanied by direct mailings to businesses in the area and promotion of the existing local members on the day.

The scheme itself with the same terms and logo is also being launched in Trading Standards services across the South of England and is now beginning to spread further. A map of coverage can be seen at www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk. In this way consumers and traders who live close to or on County boundaries are also supported, economies of scale can be applied to some purchasing and the benefits of experience shared.

Promotion of the scheme to residents and traders is a key issue, and one into which we continually put our efforts. This has taken some time to build up again after the Foot and Mouth Outbreaks, but is beginning to regain momentum.

1.2 No Cold Calling Zones

The No Cold Calling Campaign is an initiative led by Surrey Trading Standards, but working in close partnership with Surrey Police as well as close liaison with local residents associations such as the Neighbourhood Watch.

The initial scheme was run in Guildford Borough between 2005 and March 2006. Since this time the number of zones within Surrey has grown to 7, with 2 of these being within the Borough of Reigate and Banstead.

One is in the Horley area, since February 2007 and this covers approx 1400 homes and the other is in Hooley, which went live at the end of March 2008 and covers approximately 400 homes.

Surrey Trading Standards have seen an increase in the number of reports to Consumer Direct and this also indicates a greater awareness by the public.

1.3 Underage Sales

Officers within the service also undertake enforcement activities around under age sales, which is either intelligence led or project based. Two of the team contribute full time to working in partnership with Surrey Police tackling the sale of age-restricted products, mainly alcohol.

2 ANALYSIS

2.1 Buy With Confidence

Surrey Consumers receive a lot of information on scams, problems and where not to go. Over the years Trading Standards has been asked for pre-shopping advice and recommendations by consumers. Previously the services database did not contain such traders and the legislation enforced prohibited us from revealing negative information to individual enquirers. The service had even received accusations of “tarring” traders “with the same brush”.

This scheme enables us to make recommendations, discuss the member companies, promote good practice and compliance and give more comprehensive support to victims of crime. It helps the local economy, raising the standard of service from members and uses one recognised logo, which is also used regionally.

The scheme currently operates with 0.8 full time equivalent (FTE) administrative support and 2 FTE officer across the year, although peaks and troughs in demand mean a flexible approach to staffing is adopted. This is an increase in staffing from last year.

We have achieved a membership figure of 299 (31 October 2008). This is below target as we aimed to reach 400 by April 2009. We believe the reasons for this are:

1. The current economic pressures on the business community mean that a number have failed to pay their memberships fees or closed their businesses. This happens every year.
2. There has been a downturn in applications received despite additional promotion of the scheme – we view this as possibly due to the economy.
3. Pressures on the Service itself provide competing priorities and decreasing resources. Despite the nominal staffing applied to the project, turnover within the service results in pressures elsewhere and the service is small enough for all this to have an effect.
4. The promotional momentum lost due to Foot and Mouth takes time to build without a major investment and is only beginning to reach that level again.

Within Reigate and Banstead there are currently 44 member companies and we have lost 6 members this year compared to one lost last year.

2.2 No Cold Calling Zones

The problem of unsolicited doorstep calls by traders preying on the elderly, vulnerable or sometimes gullible householders is difficult to accurately assess.

Research completed by the Home Office Bogus Caller Task Force suggests that only 10% of all offences committed against householders are reported to the police or trading standards. It is estimated that countrywide the number of offences committed each year is in the region of 200,000.

From 1 July 2003 to 1 October 2007 Trading Standards received 1398 calls relating to unsolicited doorstep callers. 118 of these calls originated from the Reigate and Banstead area.

The aim is to reduce the number of unsolicited traders calling at households to solicit sales, services or goods. The implementation of the “No Cold Caller” policy will reduce the number of criminal or civil law offences committed against householders.

2.3 Underage Sales

- In 07/08 the rate of all Under Age Sales for the whole of Surrey was 15% (84 sales from 551 visits).
- In 07/08 in Reigate & Banstead the rate was 11%
- The rate for 08/09 covering the whole of Surrey is currently running at approx 11% (as at 31/10/08)
- The rate for Reigate & Banstead is currently running at approx 13.5% (as at 31/10/08)

3 OPTIONS

Not applicable

4 CONSULTATIONS

4.1 Buy With Confidence

No recent consultation has been carried out with stakeholders. Although companies are provided with feedback cards for their customers, which are returned to Trading Standards. Customers also have the opportunity to return comments via the website. Feedback remains generally good, with the main concerns relating to them not being able to find a trader in the sector they require yet. (such as loft insulation or solar panels).

We contact all companies leaving the scheme and consider their reasons with regard to any actions which may be needed.

4.2 No Cold Calling Zones

Before each campaign commences all residents involved are consulted through the Police and Neighbourhood Watch Coordinators.

The last evaluation for the Guildford area was done in October 2006.

- 92% felt more confident about sending doorstep sellers away since the NCC signs were put up.
- 86% felt the NCC signs could have or had deterred uninvited salespeople.
- 94% knew whom to contact for advice or assistance.
- 80% felt safer in their homes since the 'No Cold Calling' signs were put up.
- 96% felt the 'No Cold Calling' scheme should be expanded to other areas in the County.

The Horley evaluation is currently being undertaken.

4.3 Underage Sales

Enforcement work is completed in conjunction with the Police and is intelligence led. This means that complaints and concerns of the communities helps to guide activities.

5 FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Buy With Confidence

The Scheme fits within the trading Standards Services planned budget. Increasing membership numbers combined with membership fees will move the scheme towards a self-funding status.

The scheme does represent good value for money for the Authority and supports Government principles of prevention, working with businesses. It provides further potential in the future for partnerships, cross service working and income generation.

5.2 No Cold Calling Zones

To date the expenditure in the Horley area has been around £3350.

The total cost includes a successful Trickster event held in Reigate to promote the campaign, which approximately 100 people (mainly elderly) attended.

The costs of the project are minimal in relation to the number of people taking part in the scheme and the potential cost savings based on the cost of crime data far outweigh the initial costs. It should therefore be seen as a good investment for encouraging an increasing greater community involvement and reducing crime.

5.3 Underage Sales

No comment

6 EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** An equality impact assessment has been completed for the scheme. Buy With Confidence impacts equally on all sections of the community, the list is available and accessible to all, with additional mechanisms in place for the vulnerable. For example all care staff within the authority have been made aware of the scheme and provided with information to help them with their customers. The membership terms apply to business and compliance criteria and do not exclude or treat any businessperson differently.

All businesses are offered support to help them to meet the criteria where this is possible.

No cold calling zones are available to all residents within the designated zones.

Underage sales are included in an equalities impact assessment. Visits and enforcement work is targeted in relation to intelligence.

7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

7.3 Buy With Confidence

The Buy With Confidence Scheme supports work conducted in Surrey to prevent doorstep crime and distraction burglaries. It provides our rapid action teams with alternative traders to redirect vulnerable consumers and victims of crime to.

The scheme supports small local businesses in ensuring they are compliant with legislation and promoting good business practices. Anecdotal evidence from members indicate that some of them have experienced a substantial increase in turnover, good reputation and can see clear business benefits to membership. The scheme also promotes

appropriate waste disposal by members and has promoted other topics such as diversity through the quarterly member newsletter.

7.2 No Cold Calling Zones

No Cold Calling areas aim:

- To empower the public so they have the confidence to deal with unsolicited callers.
- To educate the public to deal effectively with unsolicited callers.
- To reduce the number of criminal offences reported to the police.
- To reduce the number of complaints made to Surrey Trading Standards.
- To reduce fear of crime in participating roads.
- To promote the use of Surrey Trading Standards approved trader's database Buy With Confidence.

7.3 Underage Sales

The underage sales work is designed to reduce the availability of age restricted products, especially alcohol to those who are underage. In this way it contributes to agendas combating anti-social behaviour and community concerns regarding such problems in their areas.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Buy With Confidence

The Buy With Confidence trader Approval Scheme is an integral part of a holistic approach to enforcement by Surrey Trading Standards Service. It balances the enforcement and educational activities undertaken under other initiatives. The scheme continues to grow in popularity with both consumers and businesses in Surrey, although it is recognised that in 2007 promotional activities have been limited by other pressures this year.

It is recommended that members continue to support the scheme and its future development.

8.2 No Cold Calling Zones

It is recommended that:

- (i) The No Cold Calling Zones initiative is continued and expanded through Reigate & Banstead as interest and resources allow.
- (ii) Where possible Trickster should be used in promoting new NCC areas and sending out the message effectively.
- (iii) The Community Safety Team continues to be represented at relevant community safety meetings / groups throughout Reigate & Banstead with the view to advising, encouraging and assist in setting up NCC areas.

It is estimated that another £3000 would be needed in 2008 to continue the work and positively make an impact on setting up new NCC areas in Reigate & Banstead.

8.3 Underage Sales

Despite the disbanding of the Surrey Together Teams the Police have mainstreamed the underage sales activities to enable them to continue to work with the service. The activities continue to have positive results and will continue.

9 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable

10 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

10.1 This paper is for information to update members on three separate initiatives. It is intended the Service will continue to develop both No Cold Calling Zones and Buy With Confidence. It is likely both will be included in the 2008-9-business plan for the Trading Standards Service.

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