



## OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE (Surrey Heath)

Annual report on Trading Standards

10<sup>th</sup> July 2008

### KEY ISSUE

The service provided by Trading Standards in Surrey Heath 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 recently considered and supported by the Safer and Stronger Select Committee and the Executive.

### OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Surrey Heath 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 project which 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.** Created to meet a need and in response to customer demand. Now over 275 business members and extremely popular with the public. This valuable new service is now charging for membership and as a result is moving towards being self financing. A full list of members is available from [www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk](http://www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk) and is searchable by postcode.

**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). As in previous years, Surrey Heath remains the safest borough in terms of doorstep crime with only 3 incidents reported to us during the same period. Those matters linked to the same offender and are currently being investigated with a prosecution expected soon. An earlier matter reported during the previous financial year is due in court soon with one offender charged with a number of deception offences following the exploitation of an elderly Camberley resident.

**No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZ's)**- in partnership with Surrey Police - Zones now operational in Guildford, Horley, Woking and Hooley with three soon to be launched in Mole Valley. 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 NCCZ's in areas with specific evidence of problems and where there is strong local Police support.

**Underage Sales** - by working more closely with the Police we have been able to improve the targeting of premises and the numbers of test purchases we are able to carry out. This has resulted in a big increase in enforcement actions (including using fixed penalty notices). The outcomes have been very positive with a significant reduction in the level of illegal sales. In Surrey Heath, 16.5% of all attempts resulted in a sale - this is a reduction on last year's figure of 20%. However, Surrey Heath remains slightly above the Surrey average of 16% and fourth highest of the districts and boroughs.

**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.

#### **Summary of Activity in Surrey Heath**

In December 2007 a Camberley based company was sentenced in relation to more than 6,000 counterfeit mobile phone accessories. The director of the company was sentenced to six months suspended imprisonment, 120 hours community service, and the confiscation of £8,000 seized during a raid on the premises. He was also ordered to pay £3,000 costs.

A Bradford-based rogue who tried to rip-off an elderly man in Frimley Green using the "left-over tarmac" routine was sentenced in September 2007.

In August 2007, a Camberley storeowner was fined £1,700 and ordered to pay costs of £1458 for having more than 700 packets of counterfeit cigarettes in his shop. Analysis of the cigarettes revealed that the fakes contained 8 times the level of lead and 4 times the level cadmium found in genuine cigarettes and were consequently far more detrimental to health.

Two rogue builders who preyed on an elderly Frimley resident were sentenced in June and were each fined £400 and ordered to each pay £400 costs.

### **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 we are still waiting for a proper response from DEFRA on our claim to recoup those additional costs. 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.

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 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.

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### **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 which impact 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 all hard to reach 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**

None

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