



SCC Trading Standards Service

**Local Committee (Woking)
2 November 2006**

KEY ISSUE:

The service provided by Trading Standards in Woking during 2005/06 and the challenges and issues we face in 2006/07.

SUMMARY:

Community Safety is the essence of our work. Following the Business Delivery Review undertaken by Surrey County Council, Trading Standards has emerged with approximately 15% reduction in staff numbers. This has inevitably forced some changes in the delivery of our work.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Committee is asked to note the initiatives being taken by the Trading Standards Service.

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 Mission Statement). The mechanisms for achieving these aims are through advice to consumers and businesses and enforcement if businesses breach Regulations that we enforce.

1.2 Performance Highlights

During the year to date the service received the following awards:

- Brindley Medal – Highly Commended - for the innovative and high profile regional approach to tackling doorstep crime.
- Trading Standards Institute award for the “Press Campaign of the year” for making a national impact with the “House of Horrors” campaign which generated £4M worth of positive publicity for the County Council.

1.3 Other performance highlights include:

- Leading the successful bid for additional funding from the DTI to create 2 new regional “Scambuster” teams.
- The Service has also provided proactive educational work, which has helped to reinforce the message that residents should not buy at the door. A performance of “Trickster” the educational musical was held at Spelthorne Village Hall. Due to this success, it is hoped that a bid will be successful for commissioning more performances throughout the County for the next financial year. 25 educational talks were delivered to elderly groups in Surrey. Our Officers educated 1460 school children in their schools.
- Public launch of the Buy with Confidence approved trader scheme – membership is continuing to rise steadily and there has been increasing demand from local business and residents.

2. Analysis and commentary

2.1 The new Consumer Direct South East consumer call centre handles simple advice requests, and refers complex cases, vulnerable people and issues requiring intervention, to Trading Standards. The trend throughout the County has been for a 50% increase in complaints received.

- 2.2 The Surrey Together Team has reported that during a recent undercover operation in Woking (Knaphill and Goldsworth Park areas), 4 out of 14 shops sold alcohol to a young volunteer. These are currently being processed.

3. Equalities implications

- 3.1 The Trading Standards Service has completed Equalities Impact Assessments for all areas of its work that have implications for customers. The Service's approach to equalities has been strengthened as a result.
- 3.2 The Service has commenced an internal project which aims to increase access to the Service by Hard to Reach Groups, including residents in Self Reliance Wards (such as Maybury), Disabled Groups, and Ethnic Minority groups.
- 3.3 The Service is trying to recruit "Community Champions" as part of its Consumer Support Network. The aim is to have pillars of ethnic minority communities to act as "gateways", signposting members of their community that need assistance into our Service.

4. Crime and disorder Implications

- 4.1 Trading Standards contributed 2 full time staff to the 4 Surrey Together Teams last year. The Team has been extremely proactive in reducing antisocial behavior of young people. A programme of 203 undercover test purchases was carried out in the County, to reveal whether shopkeepers were illegally selling alcohol or cigarettes to young people. The results were that 35 shops were found to sell to youngsters. Woking has been a "hot-spot" for this form of infringement. Therefore, advisory visits and test purchases have taken place on an annual basis.
- 4.2 The Rapid Action Team tackles the scourge of rogue traders who operate by cold calling on elderly and vulnerable residents. The Team meets the threat posed by these traders by confronting them and disrupting how they work. Countywide, we provided an immediate response and support for residents in their own home on 45 occasions, saving them £128,256. Fortunately, Woking is not a hot-spot for this form of crime and only 3 incidents were recorded during 2005/6.
- 4.3 Launch of "no cold calling zones" in Guildford in partnership with Surrey Police and Neighbourhood Watch. This has led to a reduction in distraction burglary and doorstep crime in the area. A bid is being prepared for a project to be rolled out to other hotspots.
- 4.4 Excellent enforcement successes; the first use of an ASBO for a doorstep cold calling roofer who targeted and intimidated vulnerable elderly people;

the first use of Proceeds of Crime legislation by the service, leading to the forfeiture of £350,000, and imprisonment, for those behind a major car clocking conspiracy.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 Results have been achieved in the challenging climate of the Business Delivery Review. Certain areas of service have regrettably been cut. There is no longer a Mobile Advice Centre, and there are insufficient resources to carry out a “House of Horrors” project in the current year. The service ended the year smaller and restructured, but still an effective holistic service, keen to face the challenges of the future.

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