



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE (WOKING)

TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE REPORT

20TH FEBRUARY 2008

KEY ISSUE

The service provided by Trading Standards in Woking and the challenges and issues we face.

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. The service faces a range of new challenges from government whilst continuing to ensure our work meets the priorities of the County Council.

Further pressures are being placed on Trading Standards by DEFRA reducing the funding of Animal Health enforcement by £12k even during the year where we had Foot and Mouth Disease.

This report is for information.

The Local Committee (Woking) 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 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.

1.2 PERFORMANCE SUMMARY FOR 2006/7

- During the year to date the service received the following external recognition and awards:
- Finalist for the Team Award – Surrey County Council Awards for Achievement
- Finalist at the Municipal Journal Awards for Public Protection for our holistic approach in protecting local people from doorstep crime and rogue traders.
- Daily Mirror “Hero of the Year” award, for effectively tackling rogue traders
- TSI media awards
- Consumer Television Programme - Scam Squad (2007)

1.3 OTHER HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

1.3.1 Scambusters - securing funding from DTI (now DBERR) for multi regional approach to tackling scams. This scheme is only viable if delivered through an innovative multi authority partnership (61 local authorities involved). This is by far the largest of three pilots underway nationally and we expect a national roll out later in the year based upon the excellent practice developed within the pilots. This pilot, operational since September 2006, has already saved over £800,000 for consumers and has received praise from the Consumer Affairs Minister. The Pilots will end at the end of March but the scheme will be continued for the next three years but decisions have still to be made as to how it will operate.

1.3.2 Buy with Confidence approved trader scheme. Created to meet a need and in response to customer demand. There are now over 258 businesses in the scheme with a further 60 waiting to join if they meet the standards set (34 are in Woking with 5 waiting). This valuable new service is now charging for membership and as a result is hoping to move towards being self financing over the coming years. With this aim in mind a promotion drive is about to start to double the membership this next year.

1.3.3 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 2006/7 we were able to respond to 100 incidents (47 of which were physical doorstep interventions) saving Surrey residents at least £190,000. Our holistic approach to tackling doorstep crime has been recognised by being shortlisted for the 2007 Municipal Journal award in Public Protection. It also led to the service being awarded Hero of the Year for 2006 by the Daily Mirror.

- 1.3.4 No Cold Calling Zones (NCCZ's)**- in partnership with Surrey Police - Zones are now operational in Guildford, Horley and Woking (Maybury). We are about to review the Maybury NCCZ after its first 6 months of operation. On a general level we have excellent feedback from local residents. Police stats showing 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.
- 1.3.5 Surrey Together** - by working more closely with the Police as part of new innovative multi agency teams 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 penalties for the first time). The outcomes have been very positive with a significant reduction in the level of illegal sales - in the first year it was over 35% and in the second it was 17.7%. The figure for Woking is slightly lower- currently 16% of targeted premises.
- 1.3.6 Innovative use of the media** to get our message across. Our previous high profile work such as House of Horrors has led to massive amounts of media coverage - estimated as worth over £5M in positive publicity for the local authority. It is also an incredibly cost effective means of getting an education and prevention message across - the media effectively footing the bill for it. The most recent example of how effective we are in this field is the recent BBC 3 series **Scamsquad** which focused on the work of Trading Standards officers from Surrey and Kent. Huge amounts of publicity and a powerful positive consumer message through effective engagement with the media and at zero cost to the local authority.
- All of the above have the additional benefit of contributing to corporate priorities in relation to protecting elderly / vulnerable people and as a result enhancing their ability to remain in their own homes within the community.
- 1.3.7 Foot and Mouth Disease** The impact on the service has been huge with targets being reduced overall by 25% as a result of the

consequences of this disease on the resources of our service. The Animal Health Act and Civil Contingences Act requires local authorities to plan for animal disease outbreaks. Our role is to support DEFRA and their vets to control and eradicate the disease.

During the outbreak.

- Provided a 24-hour service to DEFRA and the public during the initial stages of the outbreak.
- Manned 6 additional FMD dedicated phone lines 7 days a week, with a 24 out of hour's emergency service.
- Dealt with over 500 additional enquiries in the initial stages of the outbreak.
- Shut over 300 rights of way. This equates to 250 km of rights of way.
- Hand delivered 2250 packs to livestock keepers in the protection and surveillance zones.
- 250 staff working on FMD related tasks 7 days a week including all 60 Surrey trading standards staff.
- Mutual aid from 12 other local authorities.
- Co-ordinating and liaising with 20 outside agencies and key stakeholders.
- Provided 500 hours of rapid response on the ground enforcement and surveillance by animal health specialist staff accompanied by uniformed police officers and patrol cars.

Despite what DEFRA is indicating Foot and Mouth has not finished. There are still 28 infected premises which are subject to strict measures and rights of way are closed over them which require surveillance and will remain in place for up to 8 months. None of the IPs are in Woking but they are very close in respect to premises in Normandy and Ripley.

2 ANALYSIS

The service faces a wide range of challenges. The Unfair Commercial Practices directive is currently being transposed to UK legislation (Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Practices Regulations and Misleading Marketing Regulations) and this will have a dramatic impact on the work of the service widening the scope of trading practices which can be challenged by the service. This is likely to have significant resource implications which are currently unfunded.

Since April 2006 the service has a new duty to enforce intellectual property and copyright legislation – a significant increased burden and demand on the service. This year we have received additional funding from Government in recognition of this extra pressure. In future years however this additional funding will be in the RSG and as Surrey is a “floor” authority this will mean that we won't get the full government allocation but should continue to get the £84k we received this year.

Animal Health is a key role for the service and this year we are in the process of updating our contingency plans for handling any outbreak of animal disease including Avian Influenza and Foot and Mouth particularly after our lessons learnt from the outbreak this last year.

The Government's agenda for regulatory reform continues to have an impact with the creation of the Local Better Regulation Office under the proposed Regulatory, Enforcement and Sanctions Bill which will develop a new performance framework for the service. It will also bring in new Primary authority principal to enhance the voluntary Home authority principle and civil sanctions.

Changes to Food and Feed Hygiene regulations at primary producers will also bring a significant impact on the service with new training and qualification requirements on officers, as well as further checks on farming and related communities.

3 CONSULTATIONS

None

4. FINANCIAL AND VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The overall cost of the service has fallen significantly in recent years after savings made in both the Policy and Productivity Review and the Business Delivery Review. The latter led to the loss of 9 posts within the service (about 12%).

The new pressures on the service in the current financial climate have led to the service initiating a further review. During the review we will be consulting a stakeholders group on a range of options for the future delivery of the service. This will be completed in the next month.

Overall in the next year we are needed to make further savings of about £155,000

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. This year Trading Standards are committed to increasing access to our services by hard to reach groups and providing advice and education to businesses where English is not the first language

6. CRIME AND 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 – both issues discussed above.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: **Trading Standards Activities extract**

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