



**OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE
(WOKING)**

**REPORT ON SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL
TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE**

7 JULY 2010

KEY ISSUE

The services provided by Trading Standards during 2009/2010 and key activities in Woking.

SUMMARY

The vision is “Confident Consumers – Trusted Traders”, with wide ranging functions protecting residents, supporting reputable businesses, tackling rogue traders and contributing to the reduction of crime and disorder in Surrey.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Local Committee (Woking) is asked to note the activities of the Trading Standards Service.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 We have responsibility for dealing with unsafe or unfair trading practices and applying regulations in relation to quality, quantity, safety, description and price. We also enforce regulations covering the composition, labelling and advertising of food and ensuring animal health and welfare on farms, minimising the risk of spread of animal disease.
- 1.2 We support and educate reputable businesses, providing information and advice on consumer and regulatory issues.
- 1.3 We tackle rogue traders and deceptive business practices, protecting all Surrey residents, particularly the most vulnerable, and businesses from anti social behaviour, doorstep deception, scams and other illegal practices.
- 1.4 There are four front line service delivery teams:
 - a. **Economy and Environment.** Providing advice to all Surrey businesses, from small start-ups to large multinationals, on wide ranging legislation. This team is also responsible for discrete areas such as explosives, poisons and petroleum and also runs the “Buy With Confidence” trader approval scheme. It also leads on “Home Authority” and “Primary Authority” relationships with business.
 - b. **Health and Well-being.** Ensures that food meets legal compositional standards and is honestly labelled and advertised. The team also promotes healthy eating and the safety of the human food chain and runs the “Eat Out Eat Well” approval scheme for restaurants. The Animal Health Section enforces legislation regarding animal feeding stuffs composition and labelling, and farm animal health and welfare, its key role being disease prevention and traceability of farm livestock.
 - c. **Investigations.** Intelligence led, this team protects residents from illegal trading practices and scams through a wide range of criminal and civil investigations. It is also the lead team for actions to stop trading malpractices using the Enterprise Act and the Consumer and Business Protection Regulations, and also tackles pirated/counterfeit goods.
 - d. **Safer and Stronger Communities.** Tackles doorstep crime, cold callers and rogue traders whilst supporting vulnerable victims. The team also works to prevent the illegal sale of age-restricted products such as alcohol and cigarettes. Working closely with the Police and Borough Licensing Officers this involves advice to business, dealing with complaints and conducting test purchase operations. A key activity is the implementation of No Cold Calling Zones to help reduce doorstep crime and distraction burglary.
 - e. We also host the **Regional Fraud Unit** (previously known as Scambusters). This cross boundary unit focuses on those traders who often take steps to conceal their identity, who identify vulnerable residents and who trade across local authority boundaries.

2. ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

- 2.1 Latest analysis from the Office of Fair Trading shows that the economic impact of our fair trading work alone saves local residents £6.6 million per year.
- 2.2 Sales of alcohol to young people have been driven down from 35% to 12% across Surrey.
- 2.3 Satisfaction indicators compare well with other authorities. Business satisfaction is 83% and consumer satisfaction 92%.
- 2.4 Our appointment of an Accredited Financial Investigator in 2009 is beginning to reap rewards in seizing criminal assets under Proceeds of Crime legislation.
- 2.5 The appointment of a dedicated Intelligence Officer also reaps rewards as we now utilise information from a wide variety of sources to ensure that interventions and investigations are targeted where there is greatest need, greatest likely impact and hence greatest benefit for local residents and businesses. A monthly Tactical Assessment enables us to identify priority issues and allocate resources.
- 2.6 We continue to attract and deliver frequent and strong media coverage for the Council on both national and local TV/radio and in the press.
- 2.7 A major success was achieved in relation to No Cold Calling Zones when, at a meeting with OFGEM attended by team manager Steve Playle, all of the "Big 6" energy companies committed to respecting the wishes of residents who say no to cold callers. Evidence showed that signs and zones were routinely ignored and that nearly half of all people who switched as a result of their high pressure and aggressive sales tactics actually ended up with a worse deal. Steve Playle subsequently appeared on The One Show.
- 2.8 Some 89% of residents say that they feel safer in No Cold Calling Zones.
- 2.9 Some targets were not achieved or we stopped carrying them out during 2009/2010:
- 2.10 We did not reach our target of 450 Buy With Confidence members but still managed a significant increase to 380 despite an extremely difficult economic climate.
- 2.11 We cut back and then, in April 2010, stopped giving consumer advice. Consumer Direct continues to provide this service.
- 2.12 We cut back the availability of the business advice line to 3 days per week from 5.

3 LOCAL INITIATIVES

- 3.1 **Underage sales.** In Woking during 2009/2010 we attempted 43 test purchases of alcohol with volunteer young people, with sales made on 9 occasions (21%). Although no Cigarette test purchases were attempted during the year advice was given to traders during routine inspections. Steve Playle, manager of the Safer and Stronger Communities team chairs the Surrey Tobacco Alliance, a multi agency group striving to reduce smoking prevalence rates.

- 3.2 **Buy With Confidence approved trader scheme.** There are now over 380 members of which 42 are in Woking. There was a significant membership increase during the year with membership fees meaning that it will soon be self-financing. Our 2010/2011 target for Surrey as a whole is 460.
- 3.3 **No Cold Calling Zones.** A 'No Cold Calling Zone' is a defined area, often linked to Neighbour Watch, in which residents have stated they do not wish to receive unsolicited visits to their homes from businesses. The zones are set up by Surrey Trading Standards working with the local Police and the local Borough or District Councils. The main aim of the zones is to reduce the number of unwanted and uninvited callers to households soliciting services or selling goods, which in turn reduces the number of offences committed against Surrey residents. The zones also serve to educate householders and empower them to say "no" to cold callers. There is currently one "no cold calling zone" in Woking but we are currently examining other ways to provide a more comprehensive service across the whole of Surrey. The results of our evaluation of the current scheme in Maybury showed very positive responses to the scheme.
- 3.4 **Rapid response to doorstep crime.** By changing policies, procedures and working practices and by building improved links with partners, particularly Surrey Police, we are now able to respond immediately to incidents of doorstep deception much more effectively. We operate a "Rapid Action Team" who can attend resident's homes if they feel they are being ripped off by someone who has been to their home. The officers will intervene, dealing with the traders or conmen to ensure the resident is being treated fairly, and give them support and advice.
- 3.5 **Food Standards.** The "Eat Out Eat Well" is a partnership initiative with the Primary Care Trusts, Department of Health and Environmental Health Services from the Borough Councils. It was launched as pilot project during 2009 in Elmbridge, Guildford and Spelthorne to encourage restaurants etc to offer healthier choices and healthier cooking practices. We are beginning to open out the project to other borough council areas. Businesses are assessed to bronze, silver or gold standards dependent on their levels of hygiene and menu choice. One of the first members was HMP Coldingley so perhaps should have been called "Eat In Eat Well"! So far there are 6 gold, 29 silver and 21 bronze members. In Woking there are currently only two members, one silver and one gold. Our 2010/2011 target across Surrey is 100 members.

4 **CONSULTATION**

- 4.1 There have been no consultations in relation to Woking.

5. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Trading Standards is a relatively small service, serving all 11 districts and boroughs within Surrey from its Leatherhead office with 60.5 full

time equivalents and a budget for 2010/2011 of £2.5m. Efficiency savings have seen the overall cost fall significantly in recent years.

6 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 We enforce legislation to minimise packaging and ensure the appropriate labelling of energy efficiency information on a range of products. We are currently involved in a project to assess excessive food packaging and a project to assess compliance with performance statistics of new cars which enable buyers to make a better/more informed/greener choice. We are also involved in a two year project assessing the accuracy of weighbridges used at waste disposal sites, critical to ensure that Councils are not being over charged.

7 CRIME & DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The main areas that impact on community safety are age restricted sales and tackling doorstep crime and deception.

8 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Equalities impact assessments have been carried out in relation to key areas of the Service that are customer facing. Advice and education about doorstep crime is provided to vulnerable groups and, although we cannot continue to provide talks to local groups and associations, we do provide talks for professional groups who can cascade our community safety messages to members of the public.

We have a Vulnerable Persons Officer, created from within existing resources, to specifically address the needs of those demographic groups who tend to be targeted by doorstep criminals and we have information sharing protocols with Adult Services and the Fire and Rescue Service.

9 CONCLUSION

- 9.1 We shall strive to provide excellent value for money and to outperform every other county council. We shall use intelligence to deliver the right service to the right people locally at the right time and to enable a safer Surrey through protection, prevention and intervention.

10 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 The Committee is recommended to note the report.

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