

## Notice of Meeting

# Buckinghamshire Council and Surrey County Council Joint Trading Standards Service Committee

**Date & time**

Wednesday, 24 March  
2021 at 2.00 pm

**Place**

Remote via  
Teams

**Contact**

Angela Guest  
Tel 020 8541 8987

[angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk)

**Please note that due to the COVID-19 situation this meeting will take place remotely.**

**Please be aware that a link to view a live recording of the meeting will be available on the Buckinghamshire CC and Surrey CC Joint Trading Standards Service Committee page on the Surrey County Council website. This page can be accessed by following the link below:**

**<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/councillors-and-committees/webcasts>**

**If you have any queries relating to accessing this agenda please email [angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk)**

**Members of the Committee**

Ms Denise Turner-Stewart (Cabinet Member for Community Protection, Surrey County Council) (Co-Chairman) and Mr Fred Wilson (Cabinet Member Regulatory Services (Bucks CC)) (Co-Chairman)

**Advisory Members:**

Mr Beville Stanier (Bucks CC) and Mr David Harmer (Surrey CC)

## AGENDA

### 1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To receive any apologies for absence and substitutions.

### 2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING [23 SEPTEMBER 2020]

(Pages 5  
- 14)

To agree the minutes of the previous meeting.

### 3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Members present are required to declare, at this point in the meeting or as soon as possible thereafter

- (i) Any disclosable pecuniary interests and / or
- (ii) Other interests arising under the Code of Conduct in respect of any item(s) of business being considered at this meeting

#### NOTES:

- Members are reminded that they must not participate in any item where they have a disclosable pecuniary interest
- As well as an interest of the Member, this includes any interest, of which the Member is aware, that relates to the Member's spouse or civil partner (or any person with whom the Member is living as a spouse or civil partner)
- Members with a significant personal interest may participate in the discussion and vote on that matter unless that interest could be reasonably regarded as prejudicial.

### 4 PROCEDURAL ITEMS

#### a Members' Questions

The deadline for Member's questions is 12pm four working days before the meeting (18 March 2021).

#### b Public Questions

The deadline for public questions is seven days before the meeting (17 March 2021).

### 5 PETITIONS

The deadline for petitions was 14 days before the meeting and none have been received.

### 6 ACTION TRACKER

(Pages  
15 - 18)

The Committee is asked to monitor responses, actions and outcomes against actions and recommendations from previous meetings.

### 7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

(Pages  
19 - 22)

The Committee is asked to review and agree the Forward Work Programme.

- 8 PERFORMANCE AND JOINT SERVICE BUDGET** (Pages 23 - 42)
- The Buckinghamshire County Council and Surrey County Council Trading Standards Service Joint Committee is asked to note the performance of the service during the financial year April 2020 to 10th March 2021 (Annex A). The information provided for the 20-21 year covers performance against the key indicators agreed by this Joint Committee, additional information linked to Covid priorities and in relation to the service budget.
- 9 COVID RESPONSE** (Pages 43 - 50)
- Responding to issues posed by the Covid pandemic have been high priority for Trading Standards during this year. This report discusses the priorities within this work, what the Service has done to respond and other impacts of the pandemic on the work of the Service.
- 10 TRADING STANDARDS TOBACCO WORK** (Pages 51 - 58)
- This report considers the Service's work in relation to tobacco and associated products and is not restricted to the potential sale to children and young people.
- 11 PREVENTION WORK UNDERTAKEN BY TRADING STANDARDS** (Pages 59 - 116)
- The information provided shows the range of prevention work the Service has undertaken in the past year.
- 12 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**
- The next meeting of the Buckinghamshire County Council and Surrey County Council Joint Trading Standards Service Committee will be held on 22 September 2021.

**Joanna Killian**  
**Chief Executive**  
Published: Monday, 15 March 2021

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**MINUTES** of the meeting of the **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL JOINT TRADING STANDARDS SERVICE COMMITTEE** held at 1.30 pm on 23 September 2020 held via MS Teams..

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Committee at its meeting on Wednesday, 24 March 2021.

**Elected Members:**

\*In attendance

- \* Fred Wilson (Co-Chairman)
- \* Ms Denise Turner-Stewart (Co-Chairman)
- \* Sir Beville Stanier (non-voting) Buckinghamshire Council
- \* David Harmer (non-voting) Surrey County Council

**In attendance**

Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service

David Pickering, Trading Standards Manager – Regulation, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service

Wendy Morgan-Brown, Head of Registrars, Coroners, Archives and Trading Standards, Buckinghamshire Council

Andy Tink, Senior Principal Accountant, Surrey County Council

Michele Mansion, Trading Standards Manager - Business, Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards Service

**1/20 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]**

There were no apologies.

**2/20 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING [25 SEPTEMBER 2019] [Item 2]**

The minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting.

**3/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]**

There were none.

**4/20 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS [Item 4a]**

There were none.

**5/20 PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 4b]**

There were none.

**6/20 PETITIONS [Item 5]**

There were none.

**7/20 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME [Item 6]**

**Declarations of Interest:**

There were none.

**RESOLVED:**

The Committee agreed the Forward Work Programme.

**8/20 ACTION REVIEW [Item 7]**

**Declarations of Interest:**

There were none.

**RESOLVED:**

The Committee agreed the actions tracker.

**9/20 PERFORMANCE AND JOINT SERVICE BUDGET [Item 8]**

**Declarations of interest:**

There were none.

**Witnesses:**

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards  
Steven Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

**Key points from the discussion:**

1. Officers introduced the report and provided a brief summary. Members noted the following points:
  - The report related to the performance for the financial year April 2019 to March 2020, and quarter 1 of 2020-21 (April to June).
  - Overall the Service was performing well across the range of indicators and delivered some excellent results against key performance indicators.
  - The Joint Service budget was slightly overspent at the end of the 19-20 year (by 0.8%) due to pressures on the budget caused by EU Exit.
  - It was important to note the volatility of the performance outcomes, particularly in relation to KPI's 1 and 2. Individual case outcomes, which often have been preceded by months or years of work,

significantly affect the overall performance. Wide scale closure of courts and jury trials during the Coronavirus pandemic has emphasised this volatility, with the Service having no convictions in Q1.

- The growth in the use of volunteers had continued to be strong and increased significantly in 19-20. The Service had around 50 volunteers actively supporting the priorities of the service. They gave 5380 hours of their time during 19-20, more than doubling the hours contributed in 18-19 (2585 hours).
- 16 people/entities were convicted following prosecution in 19-20, leading to over 21 years of immediate prison sentences (a significant increase on recent years) and £28,364 of fines.
- Through national calculations the Service saved £2 million last year with work carried out to help prevent vulnerable adults being a victim of scams.

2. In regards to KPI 1 and 2, a Member asked how the courts were addressing their backlog. The officer explained that courts were under severe pressure but that they were now undertaking court hearings virtually where possible. The Service has two approaches to coping with the backlog, one is continuing to carefully consider whether a case should be prosecuted which is done in line with the Service Enforcement Policy and taking into account the current court situation. It is still appropriate to prosecute cases for serious crimes such as fraud and money laundering. The second approach is to focus on preventative work with partners with more direct interventions with vulnerable people such as call blockers. In terms of fraud and money laundering work had been undertaken dependent on intelligence, risk and the impact of crimes on industry and society. They had also focussed on raising awareness of scams including training members of the public to be "Friends Against Scams" to be able to easily spot the signs of scams. Members thanked officers for their work with the vulnerable and asked that further information be provided at a future meeting on data sharing with partners and to identify if there were any gaps in the data. Members referred not just the financial cost to the vulnerable but also impact on their mental health.

3. In terms of the covid-19 pandemic and tackling the import of unsafe products through transit sites for Heathrow the activity in this area spiked significantly during April, May and June of 2020 as the Country urgently needed supplies of PPE so air freight was used to a much greater extent than normal to speed supplies into the Country. During this time officers reviewed over 4.5 million products, the majority of which were face masks, with smaller quantities of hand sanitiser. The Service stopped over 700,000 unsafe or non-compliant items from being released into the marketplace. However, if the product could be re-purposed then it would be utilised. Supporting businesses to operate effectively and appropriately, and in accordance with rapidly introduced legislation, through the Covid Pandemic has been a significant priority. This has included providing advice on how businesses can diversify (for example to produce hand sanitiser or face coverings) or how they can alter their business model, for example to provide safe home delivery services. The Service had been working with the Association of Convenience Stores to provide advice on home deliveries so that shops

could respond to local need.

4. Members discussed the draft Trading Standards key performance indicators 2020/21 which were closely linked to service priority areas such as protecting the vulnerable, enabling businesses to get the help and support they need and improving wellbeing and public health. The new KPI's were set out on page 63 of the agenda. New KPIs included the impact of interventions with scam victims, the number and estimated value of unsafe/non-complaint goods removed from or prevented from entering the supply chain, the number of premises tested for selling illicit or age restricted products and market surveillance projects. Members welcomed the draft KPI's and commented that they were current and valid bearing in mind the covid-19 pandemic.
5. Budget – the Trading Standards budget summary on page 24 showed that at year end there was a small budget overspend of £21,000 (0.8%). This was due to the impacts of EU Exit on income. The approved budget for 2020/21 was £2,631,000. Since this was approved there have been a number of budget pressures which include pay inflation, service specific IT costs and additional savings required (which are unachievable given service pressures experience in 2019/20). The covid-19 pandemic has also impacted the Service by causing the income to drop and some additional spend requirements. The additional spend to date has been covered by each Authorities covid grant from central government. A claim would be made against lost income with the local government compensation scheme, however this would not offset 100% of lost income (approximately 75%). There have also been some small reductions in expenditure as a result of paused activity and operating online, for example reduced legal fees and travel expenses. The full financial impact of this was still to be determined. The Service had been holding vacant posts and reducing spend where possible to reduce the impact of budget pressures. A quarterly officer meeting between the finance teams from both partner Authorities had been arranged to monitor the budget. Members commented that the safety of residents remained the priority.
6. In terms of the budget for the joint service this was set out in the original joint service business case and set out planned savings of 12% over the first 4 years of the new shared service. This has been adjusted by the Joint Committee on occasion, resulting in overall savings targets for the shared service of approximately 27% over the last five years. This had included additional income and efficiency savings, which would be impacted with recent service pressures. Officers would aim to address the three priority areas as effectively and efficiently as possible.
7. A Member queried the costs of the Joint Service being divided between the partner Local Authorities in the proportion: 34% Buckinghamshire and 66% Surrey, which includes any under or over spends. An officer explained that the budget had been divided according to population size as Surrey was approximately twice the size of Buckinghamshire.

**Actions/ further information to be provided:**

Further information be provided at a future meeting on data sharing with partners and to identify if there were any gaps in the data.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee:

1. Noted the Service's performance.
2. Agreed the future Performance Indicators.
3. Noted the Joint Service Budget for 2020/21 and the identified pressures that would need to be addressed in year.

**10/20 TRADING STANDARDS ENFORCEMENT POLICY [Item 9]**

**Declarations of interest:**

None

**Witnesses:**

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards  
Steven Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

**Key points from the discussion:**

1. Officers introduced the report and provided a brief summary.  
Members noted the following details:
  - The Trading Standards Service regularly reviews its Enforcement Policy to ensure it remains appropriate and relevant to the regulatory and local authority landscape.
  - The updates include amendments to; acknowledging Buckinghamshire County Council's change to becoming part of a new Unitary Council for Buckinghamshire known as "Buckinghamshire Council", reflecting that the Service hosts the National Trading Standards Scams Team which will abide by the best practice principles found in legislation and codes that are outlined within the Enforcement Policy, clarifying that the decision as to disposal is made by a different officer than the investigating officer.

A Member asked officers to consider circulating a document for the public on the range of enforcement powers that the Service has and how the public could be protected. In addition it would be helpful to have a Member briefing on this area and any challenges being experienced across the Country.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee endorsed the amended Enforcement Policy attached at Annex A of the report.

## **11/20 TRADING STANDARDS TOBACCO WORK [Item 10]**

### **Declarations of interest:**

None

### **Witnesses:**

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards  
Steven Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

### **Key points from the discussion:**

1. Officers introduced the report and provided a brief summary. Members noted the following details:
  - The Children and Young Person's (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 requires Local Authorities to consider, at least once in every period of twelve months, the extent to which it is appropriate to carry out enforcement action to ensure that the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, are effected.
  - Trading Standards link closely to Public Health led strategies to reduce tobacco use. The Trading Standards role is mainly in relation to tackling supply.
  - There were prevention plans in place and test purchasing.
  - Sale of Illicit tobacco could be a gateway to criminality and organised crime.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee noted the report as a reflection of activity over the financial year 2019-20 and endorsed continued enforcement activities which would be undertaken in 2020-21.

## **12/20 TRADING STANDARDS SCHEME OF DELEGATIONS [Item 11]**

### **Declarations of interest:**

There were none.

### **Witnesses:**

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards  
Steven Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

### **Key points from the discussion:**

1. Officers introduced the report and provided a brief summary. Members noted the following details:
  - The Scheme of Delegation is based closely on the Scheme previously

agreed by the Joint Committee in 2015. It has been updated to reflect the current Trading Standards service structure and changes in legislative requirements. In particular, a change in the requirements in relation to Communications Data checks under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee approve the Scheme of Delegation attached at Annex A of the report.

**13/20 OFFICIAL FOOD STANDARDS AND FEED CONTROLS WORK 2020-2021 [Item 12]**

**Declarations of interest:**

There were none.

**Witnesses:**

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards  
Steven Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

**Key points from the discussion:**

1. Officers introduced the report and provided a brief summary. Members noted the following details:
  - The Food Standards Agency (FSA) requires Trading Standards services to produce an annual Official Food Standards and Feed Controls Service Plan (known as the 'FSA Plan').
  - However, for 2020/21 the Service was selected to participate in a pilot scheme run by the FSA to test out a new approach to food standards work in local authorities. As such the Service was unable (and not required) to produce a "normal" Food and Feed Plan.
  - However, since these plans were put in place, the pilot project has been delayed, due to Covid, until later in the year. It is anticipated it will start in January. The FSA indicated that the project will still run for a year so that meaningful data can be obtained. The Service have been working with the FSA to prepare for the start of the project. In the absence of a formal plan the Service have been dealing with complaints that have been received and identifying sampling projects that will be carried out until the project begins.
  - Since April the Service has been following the FSA guidance on work prioritisation during the Covid 19 pandemic. A particular focus during this time has been the impact of food business supply chain issues and diversification. This has resulted in the Service giving significant support to ensure businesses have been able to survive the situation and continue to comply with safety/legislative requirements.
2. In regards to the pilot project, a Member asked whether there was an opportunity to test the new approaches before January. An Officer responded that some Working Groups could be set up but that the FSA did want to run the pilot for a reasonable period of one year and they

would use the data to make a decision. Once the pilot project started they would be able to feedback information to the FSA on innovative ideas on using resources as effectively as possible and to promote awareness of the work of the FSA.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee note the current situation and that the activities needed to successfully participate in the Food Standards Delivery Review Local Authority pilot be approved including undertaking the Feed work agreed with the Food Standards Agency and National Trading Standards.

**14/20 ILLICIT GOODS & AGE RESTRICTED SALES ACTIVITY [Item 13]**

**Declarations of interest:**

There were none.

**Witnesses:**

Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards  
Steven Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards

**Key points from the discussion:**

1. Officers introduced the report and provided a brief summary. Members noted the following details:
  - Knife crime remained a significant concern, particularly in relation to young people and/or gang culture. In September the Service sent the National Business Crime Centre Knife Retailers Toolkit out to inform businesses based in Buckinghamshire and Surrey about their legal obligations relating to the sales of knives. The toolkit has been available on the website since February, with promotion through social media channels. The Service has worked with the Association of Convenience Stores to provide information about selling all age restricted products (including both knives and NOS) to their members (over 30,000 members nationally).
  - However, the Service want to directly make local businesses aware of the contents before they attempt test purchases and delayed this activity during Covid to allow businesses to focus on getting to grips with the new requirements on them for covid-security such as social distancing.
  - Intelligence has been gathered from a number of sources and the Service will be carrying out test purchases to establish compliance relating to underage sales via the internet during September. The Police (using police cadets as the purchasers) have taken the lead on joint operations for test purchasing knives from shops and anticipate more will be done in the coming months. The current NPCC guidance was that no under 18s should be used for test purchasing but this was being reviewed in September.
  - Nitrous Oxide misuse was a concern to local communities, particularly

in relation to anti-social behaviour and can be inhaled for a short term 'high'. To effectively tackle this issue in a local area requires partners across several agencies to work together to deal with multiple aspects of the issue in a coordinated way and the Service are also working with district council community officers and Buckinghamshire Council.

- The service was approached by Surrey police in April to work with them to attempt test purchases from several businesses in an area of Surrey. Coincidentally the Service also received several complaints and pieces of intelligence about the sale of NOS in the same area. This has led to a constructive multi-agency meeting where a plan to address the issues in this particular area has been developed. This will be followed with test purchasing jointly between Trading Standards and the Police.
2. A Member asked whether it was possible to allocate further resources to this area so that visible activity by the Service could also act as a preventative measure. An officer responded that they were working closely with partners, particularly community safety teams and the police. New regulations imposed because of the covid-19 pandemic could have an impact on this work, particularly face to face test purchasing. Members asked officers to review the use of underage volunteers and to consult Members beforehand. An officer responded that they could provide a briefing for Members on the controls in place for underage volunteers, how parents and guardians were involved and also how they were observed by staff. Members commented that they would find this useful. A Member also suggested using Fire Cadets as well as Police Cadets.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Trading Standards Joint Committee note the Service's activity in both preventing knife crime and illegal use of nitrous oxide.

**15/20 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING [Item 14]**

The Committee noted that its next meeting will be held on 24 March 2021.

Meeting ended at: 2.50 pm

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**Chairman**

Buckinghamshire CC and Surrey CC  
Trading Standards Joint Committee

24 March 2021

**Action and Recommendations Tracker**

**Purpose of the report:**

For Members to consider and comment on the Committee's Actions and Recommendations Tracker.

**Introduction:**

The tracker recording actions and recommendations from previous meetings is attached as **Annex A**, and the Committee is asked to note that all previous actions are now closed.

**Recommendations:**

The Committee is asked to monitor responses, actions and outcomes against actions and recommendations from previous meetings.

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**Report contact:** Angela Guest, Committee Manager

**Contact details:** 020 8541 9075, [angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk)

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## Buckinghamshire CC and Surrey CC Joint Trading Standards Committee Actions and Recommendations Tracker

The recommendations tracker allows Joint Committee Members to monitor responses, actions and outcomes against their recommendations or requests for further actions. The tracker is updated following each Joint Committee meeting. Once an action has been completed and reported to the Joint Committee, it will be removed from the tracker.

### Actions

Reference	Date of Meeting	Recommendations/Actions	Responsible Officer/ Member	Response	Status
1/21	23/9/2020	<p><b>Performance and Joint Service Budget</b></p> <p>Further information be provided at a future meeting on data sharing with partners and to identify if there were any gaps in the data.</p>	Steve Ruddy	A verbal update will be given during the meeting	Open

### Completed actions (to be deleted)


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Buckinghamshire CC and Surrey CC  
Trading Standards Joint Committee

24 March 2021

**Forward Work Programme**

**Purpose of the report:**

For Members to consider and comment on the Committee's Forward Work Programme.

**Introduction:**

A Forward Work Programme recording agenda items for consideration at future Trading Standards Joint Committee meetings is attached as **Annex A**.

**Recommendations:**

The Committee is asked to review and agree the Forward Work Programme.

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**Report contact:** Angela Guest, Committee Manager

**Contact details:** 020 8541 9075, [angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:angela.guest@surreycc.gov.uk)

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This forward plan is subject to ongoing review and may be amended depending on external events and Government policy

## Annex A

# Forward Work Programme

## September 2021 – Formal public meeting

Item title:	Trading Standards Tobacco Work
The Committee will be asked to:	Consider the report as a reflection of activity over the financial year 2019-20 and consider enforcement activities which may be undertaken in 2020-21
Item title:	Budget and Performance
The Committee will be asked to:	Note the Service's performance and current financial position.

## March 2022 – Formal public meeting

Item title:	Budget and Performance
The Committee will be asked to:	Note the Service's performance and current financial position.

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**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 24 MARCH 2021**

**LEAD OFFICER: AMANDA POOLE  
ASSISTANT HEAD OF TRADING STANDARDS**

**SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE AND JOINT SERVICE BUDGET**

**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The Buckinghamshire County Council and Surrey County Council Trading Standards Service Joint Committee is asked to note the performance of the service during the financial year April 2020 to 10th March 2021 (Annex A). The information provided for the 20-21 year covers performance against the key indicators agreed by this Joint Committee, additional information linked to Covid priorities and in relation to the service budget.

The information provided shows that:

- Performance is variable across the range of indicators this year, with Covid impacts and Covid priorities having taken precedence. There remain some excellent results against some key performance indicators.
- The Joint Service budget is forecast to be underspent at the end of the 20-21 year.

The Joint Committee is asked to note the position in relation to the joint service budget in 2021/22.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that the Trading Standards Joint Committee:

1. notes the Service's performance.
2. notes the joint service budget for 2021/22 and the identified pressures that will need to be addressed.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Joint Committee is required by the Inter Authority Agreement which underpins the service to:



- a) Ensure effective performance of the Service. This includes formally reviewing performance annually by considering performance against the agreed measures and agreeing performance measures for the Service in advance of the start of each financial year.
- b) Maintain financial oversight of the Service and ensure sound financial management.

<b>PERFORMANCE DETAILS:</b>
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1. The performance of the joint service is measured through key performance indicators agreed by the Joint Committee. These are detailed in the attached 2020-21 performance report. This year has been exceptional due to the disruptive impact of the pandemic. Performance in several areas has been undermined because business have been operating differently or have been closed for much of the period and the interventions we would normally make have not been possible because of Covid restrictions. In addition, major new unanticipated demands and new responsibilities were given to the service to help the national response to the crisis. The service has proved exceptionally agile and adaptable in meeting those new demands efficiently and effectively and in a way which both protects resident's safety but also which helps businesses comply. More detail of the service response to Covid is provided in a separate paper on this agenda.
2. There are no statutory performance indicators for Trading Standards and there is no performance benchmarking data available for comparison. Following the National Audit Office report on "Protecting consumers from scams, unfair trading and unsafe goods" published in December 2016 the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers (ACTSO) have developed a new national Impacts and Outcomes Framework for Trading Standards. This was reported on formally for the first time for the 2018-19 year and whilst nationally aggregated data is available, no benchmarking data is available.
3. The Joint Committee are invited to note the volatility of some of the performance indicators. Individual case outcomes, which often have been preceded by months or years of work, significantly affect the overall performance. Wide scale closure of courts and jury trials during the Coronavirus pandemic has emphasized this volatility, with the Service having far fewer convictions during 20/21 than in previous years due to fewer.
4. A key Service priority is protecting the most vulnerable, tackling fraudulent illegal and unfair trading practices, including serious and organised crime. Savings for residents have increased this year compared to last year, assisted by significant compensation paid by defendants at the time of entering guilty pleas. In the largest of these cases, two defendants paid victims back a total of £178,000. However, the number of people convicted this year (5) is far fewer than last year (16). This is due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the court system which has caused trials and cases to be significantly delayed. All the convictions this year were either due to defendants pleading guilty or as a result of very short (less than one day) trials. The financial impact of our scam interventions is slightly less than last year. To the end of December the savings were £1.3m compared to a total last year of £2.1m. The impact of our interventions with scam victims

referred to us by the National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team varies year on year. This variation occurs because of the work streams carried out by the National Team which result in the subsequent referrals of victims to us. In some cases, there will be a higher level of financial savings than others. We continue to deal with all the referrals made to us by the NTS Scams Team.

5. Our second key priority is to enable businesses to get the help and support they need to thrive and grow. Delivering public protection through supporting businesses to comply with their legal responsibilities and ensuring a level playing field. Despite the difficult and unusual trading situation, the service continues to successfully grow Primary Authority Partnerships, currently with 124 Partnerships compared to 109 at the end of last year, with businesses regularly approaching the Service seeking a partnership.
6. Supporting businesses to operate effectively and appropriately, and in accordance with rapidly introduced legislation, through the Covid Pandemic has been a significant priority. This has included providing advice on how businesses can diversify (for example to produce hand sanitiser or face coverings) or how they can alter their business model, for example to provide safe home delivery services. This work is further discussed in Annex B.
7. The UK's EU Exit provides and has provided challenges for businesses, in terms of understanding what changes are happening when, how it affects them and how they may need to do things differently to comply with the regulatory environment. Understanding the position and being able to translate that for businesses has been challenging, although there have been few particular peaks in requests for information from businesses with it instead being more gradual requests from businesses.
8. The Service supports a number of trader approval schemes, including: Eat Out, Eat Well; TrustMark and Traders4U. During the year we have also had a dwindling number of Checkatrade members as previous Trading Standards Approved members worked through their final 12 months of our approval. By the end of March there will be no Trading Standards Approved Checkatrade members. Take up of the recently launched Traders4U scheme has been slow, not assisted by the unusual trading conditions. We will review the scheme in more depth once trading conditions are more settled.
9. Improving wellbeing and public health; tackling the supply of unsafe, dangerous or age restricted products and working to maintain the integrity of the food chain, including food quality, nutrition, and animal health is the third key priority for the Service and work on this priority has been quite different to previous years because of the response to the Covid pandemic, which is discussed in more detail in the Covid response paper.
10. Some aspects of work carried out in previous years has been much more limited this year, whilst work on other aspects, both new and those that were most closely aligned to urgent public health priorities has been increased significantly. For example, work to tackle the import of unsafe products through transit sites for Heathrow has been important. Particularly during April, May and June of 2020 the

Country urgently needed supplies of PPE so air freight, and Heathrow, was used to a much greater extent than normal to speed supplies into the Country. During this year our officers have reviewed over 5 million products, the majority of which were face masks, with smaller quantities of hand sanitiser. The Service stopped over 1.2 million unsafe or non-compliant items from being released into the marketplace (compared to around 25,000 items last year).

11. The year has seen multiple new pieces of legislation with business restrictions to reduce the spread of Covid, and enforcement of these has been shared between Trading Standards, Environmental Health and the Police. Responding to this new legislation has taken significant resource, with over 6,000 visits to businesses to advise them or check compliance and responding to over 400 complaints.
12. Work tackling illegal supplies of tobacco is a significant part of this work stream and we continue to investigate offenders supplying illegal tobacco, making use of sniffer dogs to locate hidden tobacco. There were two prosecutions of such offenders during the 20-21 year, resulting in fines. This area of work is further discussed in the Tobacco Paper.

#### **BUDGET 20/21 AND 21/22 PLANS:**

13. The costs of the Joint Service are divided between the partner Local Authorities in the proportion: 34% Buckinghamshire and 66% Surrey, which includes any under or over spends.
14. The budget for the joint service was set out in the original joint service business case and set out planned savings of 12% over the first 4 years of the new shared service. This has been adjusted by the Joint Committee on occasion, resulting in overall savings targets for the shared service of approximately 27% over the last five years. This has included additional income and efficiency savings.
15. There are a number of factors which introduce volatility to the budget. It is challenging to accurately predict income and its timing especially where costs are recovered from prosecutions. Some cases go through the legal process in a matter of weeks and others can run into years. Conversely the timing and amount spent on prosecutions varies depending what approach is taken by the defence, what arguments are made and whether the defendant pleads guilty at an early opportunity. However, the Service manages its' budget closely to even out the most volatile factors where it is possible.

#### **2020/21**

16. The agreed 2020/21 partnership budget was £2,631,000. Pressures totalling £124,000 were subsequently identified giving a required budget of £2,755,000. The partnership budget was not officially increased, with both authorities being aware of the pressures and possible additional funding required.
17. The service has experienced a significant reduction in income, estimated at £403,000, largely due to the effects of the Covid pandemic.

18. We are currently forecasting a year end outturn position of £2,689,000. Whilst that is over the original budget, the service has largely contained the identified pressures and is expected to come in under the required budget that was previously reported to the committee. This is due to action taken to mitigate the impacts of Covid on our income. In the first half of the year a number of posts were held vacant in order to offset reductions in income. However, in September we became able to apply to a new Government Grant for Lost Income, which has now offset a significant proportion of the income lost.
19. When we became aware of the new Lost Income Grant we began recruitment to our most key posts, but the time lag in this taking effect and holding the vacancies in the early part of the year have been able to reduce expenditure. In addition the suspension of activities and changes in working arrangements due to Covid have led to some other reductions in costs, such as in legal expenses and travel.
20. The Service has also been able to make use of other Covid related grants from both Council's to assist with enforcement work and has used this money to recruit short term contractors at key points of pressure during the year.

### **2021/22 budget**

21. The proposed budget for 2021/22 is £2,676,000. This is affordable based upon the funding allocated by each authority. Annex A, provides a summary of this budget and the movement between years. Pressures of £123,000 have by partly offset by expected savings of £78,000.
22. There are risks to this budget – that the UK's exit from the EU and the coronavirus pandemic cause increased demands on the service in the coming year or reduces income which could adversely affect the budget. Both Councils have been made aware of these, however both have taken the same approach that there is not funding available to fund them in the budget in advance and therefore they accept that they are risks.

### **Replacement Reserve**

23. The Service operates a replacement reserve. This was set up to enable small annual contributions to be made for the planned replacement of capital items, such as the two office vans, without that having a disproportionate effect on the year in which they are replaced. Since it was set up, it has become apparent that there are other one off spends items for which it may be appropriate.
24. The current balance in the reserve is £55,758. This includes a £30,000 contribution made in 2018/19 towards the implementation costs of the services new IT system. However, the service has been able to fund the implementation costs of the new system within the current financial year without drawing upon the reserve. This gives opportunities for it to be used to fund other investments required or be held towards mitigating some of the financial risks identified earlier in paragraph 5.10.

<b>CONSULTATION:</b>
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25. No external consultation has taken place.

#### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

26. All significant risks affecting the service (which include items beyond budget and performance) are regularly considered by the management team (two monthly for red and amber risks, 6 monthly for green risks).
27. Where risks become higher, these are shared with the Trading Standards Board for awareness and discussion.

#### **FINANCIAL & VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS:**

28. The Service has delivered all elements of the business case. The forecast budget outturn position for 2020/21 is above the original agreed budget but lower than the required budget previously reported to and acknowledged by the committee.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

29. The Inter-Authority Agreement provides the legal framework within which the Service operates. As set out in paragraph 3.1 of the report, the Joint Committee is responsible for ensuring the effective management of the Service and maintaining financial oversight. The Service's performance is then subject to scrutiny in the participating authorities in the normal way.
30. The report makes a number of references to relevant legal processes and proceedings that the Service has been involved in over the last year. There are no other specific legal issues that need to be drawn to the attention of the Committee.

#### **EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY:**

31. The performance being reported will not impact on residents or staff with different protected characteristics, as such an Equality Impact Assessment has not been included.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

32. Performance continues to be reviewed by the Service Management team and by the Joint Service Board.

#### **REPORT DETAILS**

##### **Contact Officer(s):**

Mrs Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards 07984 458 679  
Mr Andy Tink, Senior Finance Business Partner, 07971 666184  
Mr Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards 01372 371730

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**Consulted:**  
N/A

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**Annexes:**

Annex A: Trading Standards Budget 2021/22  
Annex B: Key Performance Indicators 2020/21

**Sources/background papers:**

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## Annex A

### Trading Standards

	<b>Agreed budget 2020/21 £000</b>	<b>Proposed budget 2021/22 £000</b>
Trading Standards Partnership	2,631	2,676
<b>Net budget</b>	<b>2,631</b>	<b>2,676</b>
<u>Expenditure:</u>		
Staffing	3,007	3,053
Non Staffing	460	389
Service specific IT systems	0	60
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>3,467</b>	<b>3,502</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>-836</b>	<b>-826</b>
<b>Net budget</b>	<b>2,631</b>	<b>2,676</b>
Surrey County Council Contribution	1,736	1,766
Buckinghamshire County Council Contribution	895	910
<b>Joint Budget</b>	<b>2,631</b>	<b>2,676</b>

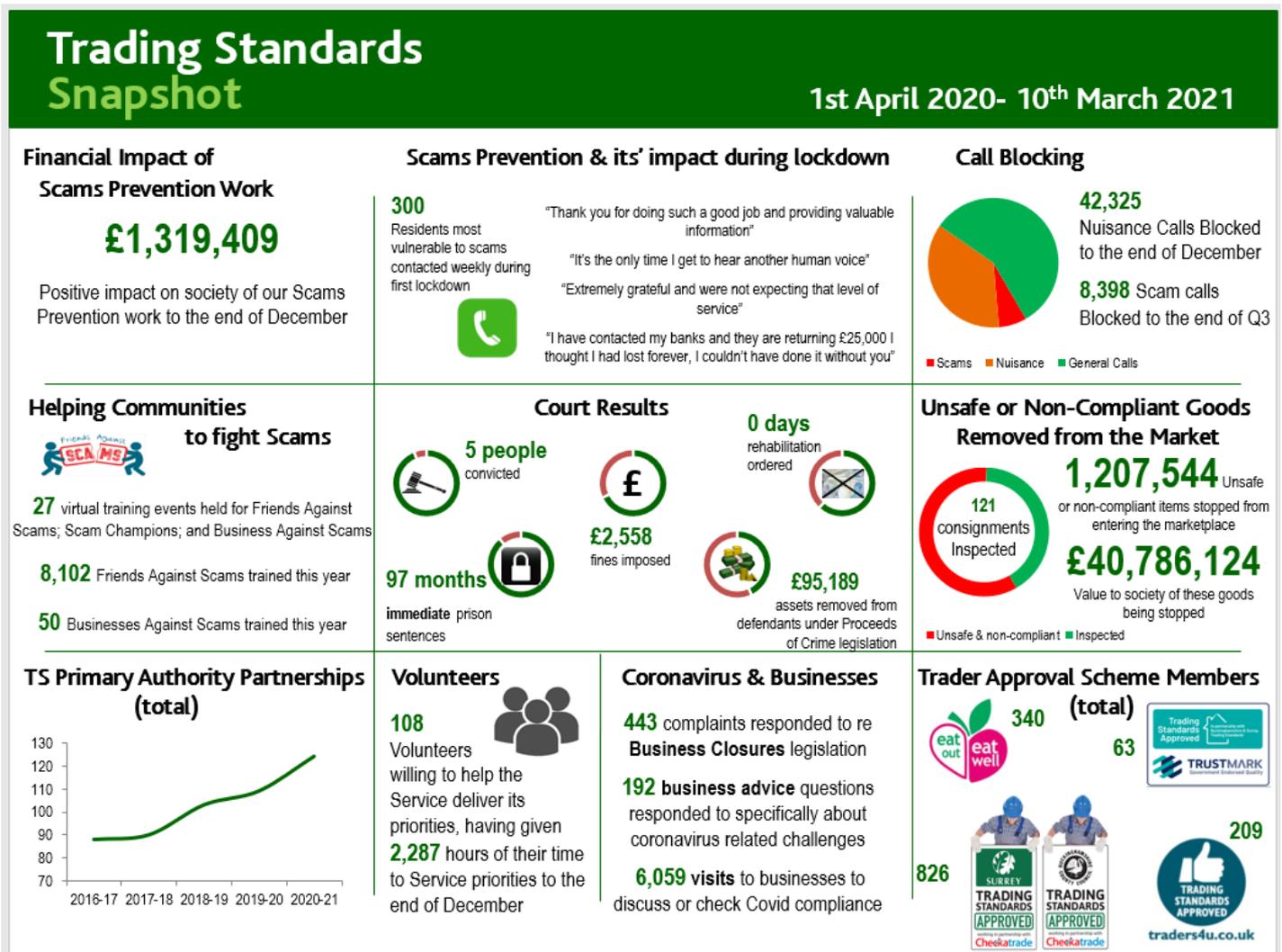
### Movement between years

	<b>2021/22 £000</b>
<b>Agreed 2020/21 base budget</b>	<b>2,631</b>
<b>Pressures</b>	
2020/21 Pay Inflation	12
2020/21 Removal of additional savings	51
Service specific IT systems	60
<b>Total Pressures</b>	<b>123</b>
<b>Savings</b>	
Cessation of Car user allowance	-23
Hold staffing vacancies	-26
Travel	-20
Supplies & services savings	-9
<b>Total Savings</b>	<b>-78</b>
<b>Budget</b>	<b>2,676</b>

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# KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

## Summary - April to 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020/21



**Service Priority Area 1 - Protecting the most vulnerable. Tackling fraudulent illegal and unfair trading practices, including serious and organised crime.**

Key Performance Indicator	Comments	Status
Increase the financial savings for residents as a result of our interventions and investigations	Savings for residents fluctuate year by year (and quarter by quarter) often due to factors beyond our control. Savings for residents to date are £458,870 compared to a total of £387,000 in the full 19-20 year.	Green 
Actions to stop rogue traders operating in Buckinghamshire and Surrey	5 defendants were convicted during the year, with 97 months immediate custody awarded, compared to 16 convictions last year. This was due to the impact of coronavirus on the Criminal Justice System as most courts had to severely reduce their operating capacity and all jury trials were postponed for a time at the start of the year. The Service has a number of cases in progress but all have been delayed as a consequence, adding additional volatility to the data it is possible to report on. Investigations into criminal offences have continued, although some actions were postponed for a short time due to Covid restrictions. Activity to make people aware of potential Covid scams by rogue traders, and to encourage people not to become victims, has been a high priority for the Service with advice and information being regularly released by the Service and picked up across local, regional and national media.	Red 
Impact of our interventions with scam victims, as measured by the NTS Scams Calculator	Over £1.3m has been saved for residents and in avoided health and social care costs as a direct result of our scams interventions until the end of December. This compares to a full year figure last year of £2.1m. The impact of our interventions with scam victims referred to us by the National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team varies year on year. This variation occurs because of the work streams carried out by the National Team which result in the subsequent referrals of victims to us. In some cases, there will be a higher level of financial savings than others. We continue to deal with all the referrals made to us by the NTS Scams Team.	Red 

The Joint Committee are receiving a separate report with more detail on prevention initiatives within the Service. This includes: the use of call blockers; safeguarding phone calls; Friends Against Scams; Business Against Scams; Media and Social Media; Scam Champions and Scam Marshals.

Two of the convictions came in relation to a doorstep crime investigation involving 5 victims based in Buckinghamshire, Surrey and London. The victims lost a total of £178,000, which was paid out for roofing works on their properties. The traders cold called at the victim's properties, initially offering to do a small job such as roof or guttering clearing. After this work had started the traders then suggested a number of other urgent roofing works were required, which would end up costing the victims thousands of pounds more than the price of the initial works. The majority of the works carried out by the traders were found to be unnecessary and excessively overpriced by an expert building surveyor. The two traders pleaded guilty to offences under the Fraud Act and the Companies Act and were sentenced to 36 months immediate imprisonment and 31 months immediate imprisonment. Both defendants were disqualified from being a Director for 10 years. All of the £178,000 has been paid back to the victims from the defendants.

A further two convictions related to the sale of illicit tobacco and more detail about the circumstances of these is given in the separate tobacco report.

The fifth conviction related to emergency home repairs and involved a trader who had been prosecuted by the service in 2019 for various fraud offences in relation to his business at the time as a locksmith. This previous offending resulted in him being sentenced to 18 months immediate custody in July.

Shortly before the trader was sentenced in relation to the first prosecution, it came to our attention that he had more recently been operating an emergency plumbing business and undertaking like for like behaviour as a plumber as he had when he was operating as a locksmith. Namely he was attending people's residential properties on an emergency call out basis, providing initial quotations, carrying out the works and then subsequently inflating the costs. In total, consumers over both the cases had paid out in excess of over £22,000.

The trader entered guilty pleas covering offending against all of the consumers concerned and compensation of £22,446 was received from a relative of the trader for the victims, as well as a contribution towards the prosecution costs. The trader was sentenced in November to an additional 12 months in custody in addition to the 18 months he is already serving.

**Service Priority Area 2 - Enabling businesses to get the help and support they need to thrive and grow.** Delivering public protection through supporting businesses to comply with their legal responsibilities and ensuring a level playing field.

Key Performance Indicator	Comments	Status
<p>To increase the number of Primary Authority Partnerships</p>	<p>The number of Primary Authority Partnership we have has increased from 109 at the start of the year to 124 currently. The Service has prioritised providing high quality, practical advice to businesses who have faced significant challenges, particularly around their supply chains; in understanding how new business closures legislation affects them; in understanding what rights and responsibilities they have when something has been adversely affected by the pandemic; and in responding to the new trading conditions. Some businesses with whom we have Primary Authority Partnerships are required to close during the various lockdowns, and some have been very busy responding to new demands for their goods/services. One example of our activity in this area early in the year was to work closely with the Association of Convenience Stores (who have over 30,000 members nationally) and our partners in Environmental Health to develop complete guidance for convenience stores who wanted to set up new safe home delivery services to support people who were isolating at home (see below)</p>	<p>Green</p> 
<p>Support to trader approval schemes</p>	<p>The service launched Traders4U early in the year. There has been a gradual uptake. The Service continues to run “Eat Out, Eat Well” with the support of Health partners and is expanding this to Eat Well, Start Well to focus particularly on early years settings. However due to the challenges in conducting face to face visits at times during the year this work has slowed considerably. We continue to work in partnership with TrustMark. We had expected an up kick in this work with the announcement during the year of the new Green Homes Grant, as any work carried out under the scheme must be completed by a TrustMark registered business, however this has not translated into as much additional work as predicted.</p>	<p>Red</p> 

**ACS best practice**

**HOME DELIVERY GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL SHOPS**

This guidance is designed to provide reassurance to convenience store retailers who want to carry out local grocery deliveries to support people self isolating. There are regulations that can easily be followed through normal business practices, including on how you:

- Take orders and payments
- Manage data
- Keep food safe
- Physically deliver products

This guidance explains what these regulations are, and provides simple advice on conducting deliveries in a way that best promotes good hygiene and limits the risk of passing on Covid-19 and other viruses when doing so.

**How do you take an order?**

You can receive an order on the phone, through your own website or another online platform, for example WhatsApp, email, text, a texter direct message or a Facebook message.

Whichever approach you use, there are some important principles to consider:

- If you're providing a shopping list or order form, make sure it's clear what you're selling, the quantity (ACS Fair Trading Guide [here](#)) and food allergen information (ACS Managing Food Safety and Hygiene Guide [here](#)).
- If you're taking generic orders, try to confirm specific details eg brand, quantity; it is acceptable to make a reasonable substitution.

You can promote that you are offering a temporary delivery service for customers using this template poster for your store and on your social media platforms.

(Download the poster [here](#))

**How do you take payment?**

You can take payment by any method, including:

- Customer self payment card payments - this means manually entering the customer's long card number and security code on your terminal.
- Use a virtual terminal provided by PayPal or Worldpay and other online systems.
- Cash is perfectly acceptable and for best hygiene practice you should separate handling of cash and food preparation (ACS Managing Food Safety and Hygiene [here](#)).
- You can offer credit at your discretion but you cannot add on a fee or a charge interest. Typically allowing this will mean allowing customers to take delivery of goods and pay you the agreed amount at a later date.

**ACS best practice**

**HOME DELIVERY GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL SHOPS**

**How to deliver to customers?**

- Check your vehicle insurance. Standard car insurance policies may not cover the use of the vehicle for business purposes and you may need to update your policy. Contact your insurance provider/broker to check if they can extend your business and vehicle insurance to cover home delivery.
- Chilled food can be kept at ambient temperature for a maximum of four hours in one continuous period, so you do not have to have chilled compartment or box for a short journey. However if a chilled product is kept at a temperature of more than 5°C for more than four hours, it should be destroyed.
- Courtesy to other residents and drivers should be considered when making deliveries, and the sign can be printed and placed on your dashboard. Download the sign from ACS' website [here](#).
- Community grocery delivery in progress
- Flanking restrictions apply as normal. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government advise that good practice in parking enforcement allows for a 10 minute grace period.

**How to operate a collection service**

All of the guidance on making deliveries will also apply to offering a collection service for customers, their neighbours or family, and local volunteers.

26% of customers still collect services

12% of convenience stores already offer home grocery delivery

**Reduce the risk of spreading Covid-19**

You should minimise the risk of spreading infection from Covid-19 at any time. Good practice that should be followed at all times includes:

- Adopt sensible measures to minimise risk especially when delivering to people who have stated they are self isolating, notably by leaving deliveries at the front door. Do not enter their home or directly hand the delivery to them (see the Government's Stay at Home guidance [here](#)).
- Washing hands for a minimum of 20 seconds every time you return to the store, and at least every two hours.
- Avoiding shaking hands or direct contact with customers and others when delivering products.
- Cleaning on a regular basis surfaces you regularly touch, including phones, car steering wheels, bicycle handles and car handles.
- If you have less than 250 full time employees you do not have to apply the single use carrier bag charge.

**ACS best practice**

**HOME DELIVERY GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL SHOPS**

**How do you manage data security?**

We recommend all retailers follow good practice in handling customer data. Retailers should ensure their systems are secure, and only retain customer details as long as it is justifiable to do so. The Secretary of State for Health has stated that "no one should constrain work on responding to coronavirus due to data protection laws." Article 4(1)(d) states: "Processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the controller." For more information, visit the ICO website [here](#).

**GDPR**

**Age restrictions**

All product age restrictions apply, for more details on which products are age restricted and for specific policies on checking ages for deliveries, see ACS' [Inventorying Liqueur Sales Guide](#) [here](#).

**About this guidance**

This guidance has been developed in consultation with Surrey and Bucks Trading Standards, and Woking Borough Council. ACS Assured Advice guides referenced here are part of ACS' Assured Advice scheme with Surrey & Bucks Trading Standards, Woking Borough Council and Basingstoke & Deane Borough Council which means that ACS members are protected in law if the follow this advice.

All retailers can freely access this advice and follow it as good practice backed by national and local government departments.

**Where to go for help?**

- Speak to your wholesaler or supplier group to see if there are systems they use that you can link with.
- Speak to your card payments provider.
- There are a number of shopping apps and delivery partners you can work with.

**CONTACT**

For more details on this guidance, contact a member of the ACS team on 0253 55000. For more details on ACS: Visit: [www.acs.org.uk](http://www.acs.org.uk) Call: 0252 55000 Follow us on Twitter: @ACS\_Localshops

ACS | the voice of local shops

During the year the business team have continued to offer a range of options, some are free and some are chargeable on a cost recovery basis. The offer ranges from web information and simple signposting to large Primary Authority Partnerships. Accessed through a helpline and direct email address, each service is tailored to the individual businesses needs.

The team's activities directly contribute to levels of compliance and individual consumer experiences with those businesses.

During this year the coronavirus pandemic has impacted on the way we do business:

- Requests for help and information which related directly to Covid-19 were delivered free of charge impacting on the income normally derived from pay as you go advice
- We have successfully replaced face to face business training with webinars
- Whilst the vast majority of our Primary Authority partners have stayed with us renewals have been delayed and activities have not proceeded as planned. This has impacted on the income normally derived from pay as you go income
- During this challenging year our partners have appreciated Bucks and Surrey commitment to remaining available and responding quickly to their enquiries.
- Our reputation has continued to bring potential Primary Authority partners to us – see *new partnerships since June 2020* below
- Although we have seen businesses merge or focus on savings we have also continued to receive approaches from new businesses seeking to join us.

“If anything proved the value of a PA relationship it is this. My sincere thanks go to the team at Buckinghamshire and Surrey for all their support and help this year – it is very obvious the benefit of the partnership to our members”.

Andrew Chalk, British Blinds and Shutters Association, Director of Operations

The high percentage of food related businesses provided us with a core of stability from those who remained trading throughout the pandemic.

This stability enables us to be creative, developing partnerships with innovative businesses and those who may be highly technical from a regulatory perspective. As a result we are working with them to develop centres of excellence for the regulation of accreditation, Gin and CBD novel foods.

20 off the existing 124 Primary Authority Partnerships are “Coordinated<sup>1</sup>” giving us a broader impact by reaching 21,568 businesses nationwide. We are the only authority in the country supporting this number of organisations.

Our local business advice line has handled 1735 enquiries to date. Of these just over 10% were directly related to the Covid regulations. Amongst the wide variety of subjects received, there seemed to be topical trends which came in waves relating for example to new business ideas, balloons, manufacturing dog biscuits, wax melts and honey.

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<sup>1</sup> Coordinated – with a trade body or association

<p><b>124</b> Primary Authority Partnerships</p> 	<p><b>64%</b> of partnerships support businesses for food standards and/or food safety advice</p> 	<p><b>57</b> Single point of contact (SPOC) relationships between businesses and other regulators managed</p> 
<p><b>20</b> Coordinated partnerships supporting</p> 	<p><b>Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards services for businesses</b> April 2020 - March 2021</p>	<p><b>179</b> Business calls to helpline about Covid regulations answered free of charge <i>(excludes advice as part of enforcement activities)</i></p> 
<p><b>21,568</b> Small businesses nationwide</p> 	<p><b>12</b> Partnerships support innovative / developing sectors e.g. e-scooters, cannabinoid products, digital identification, contactless collections, protecting a brand or sector</p> 	<p><b>563</b> Business delegates and other local authority officers supported through the provision of training.</p> 



New Partnerships since June 2020



Businesses have been supported with diversification to produce or import hand sanitiser, face coverings and PPE, food labelling, alternative ingredients, allergens, food delivery, takeaway, meals for vulnerable residents, and using caterers supplies for retail. Throughout this period there have been significant numbers of questions relating to businesses who could open, how to open and whether businesses should be open.

For our Primary Authority Partners we amended the suite of guidance for the Association of Convenience Stores relating to Covid safe trading, deliveries (above) and terms and conditions. The range of advice to other partners included cancellation of contracts and frustrated contracts where installations are necessarily delayed, safe reopening of premises and how this applies in the context of devolution, converting ambient food to frozen food and using available but not current labelling to supplement national food supplies, multipacks and car showrooms.

Two examples of our work with Primary Authority Partners (the British Blind & Shutter Association and the Association of Convenience Stores) were recognised and shared by The Office of Product Safety and Standards (part of BEIS) with other Regulators as good practice to counter uncertainty during the pandemic crisis (see article to the right).



## Primary Authority News – May 2020

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### How you are using Primary Authority to counter uncertainty

#### Providing key advice on contracts

The British Blind & Shutters Association and Trustmark sought advice from their primary authority partner Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards on how contracts for goods and services should be adapted due to coronavirus.

Topics included delays, cancellation rights, consumers no longer affording goods and dealing with home visits when consumers are self-isolating.

The Primary Authority Advice focused on the importance of maintaining effective communication between parties with their members.

#### Supporting thousands of retailers

To support local communities many Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) members diversified into home deliveries. ACS worked with their primary authority partners Woking Borough Council and Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards to get advice on adapting practices for click and collect, delivery charges, social distancing, cleaning, waste storage, alternative payment methods, managing data, transporting chilled foods and price increases. They have also worked with their primary authority partners to resolve enforcement issues.

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**Service Priority Area 3** - Improving wellbeing and public health; tackling the supply of unsafe, dangerous or age restricted products and working to maintain the integrity of the food chain, including food quality, nutrition, and animal health.

Key Performance Indicator	Comments	Status
Number and estimated value of unsafe/non-compliant goods removed from or prevented from entering the supply chain.	After reviewing over 5 million items, over 1.2million unsafe or non-compliant products were stopped from entering the supply chain by the Service with an estimated impact to society of over £40m. These products were mainly face masks and other protective equipment related to the outbreak of Covid. This is a very large increase in work in this area compared to last year (when around 25,000 unsafe/non-compliant items were prevented from entering the supply chain) as the supply of safe PPE became a national priority. Significant imports were (unusually) seen via Heathrow in the early part of the year due to the speed of air freight versus the more usual sea freight for this type of product.	Green 
Number of premises tested for selling illicit or age restricted products inappropriately, and approximate value of seized goods.	26 premises were tested for selling illicit or age restricted products inappropriately during the year, compared with 64 in the previous year.	Red 
Market surveillance projects carried out, including in relation to food	9 food market surveillance projects have been carried out during the year, mainly in the summer/early autumn in between lockdowns and once the Food Standards Agency guidance setting the expectation Trading Standards Services should not undertake proactive project work that required visiting shops/food businesses was removed.	Red 

**Response to Covid related issues** - This year has been exceptional due to the disruptive impact of the pandemic. Performance in several areas has been undermined because business have been operating differently or have been closed for much of the period and the interventions we would normally make have not been possible because of Covid restrictions. In addition, major new unanticipated demands and new responsibilities were given to the service to help the national response to the crisis. The service has quickly adapted to meet those new demands efficiently and effectively and in a way which both protects resident's safety but also which helps businesses comply. This has included responding to over 400 complaints to date, engaging with many businesses by phone to help them comply with the legislation, and making over 6,050 visits to check compliance or advise businesses. More detail of the service response to Covid is provided in a separate paper on this agenda.

**Assessing the Compliance of PPE** - During the year, significant work has been carried out to assess the safety and compliance of PPE, particularly that being imported via Heathrow. This work was paused in the latter part of 2020 and early 2021 whilst further external funding was sought, but this has been resolved and work has now resumed. During the course of the checks carried out by officers' numerous irregularities with the documentation have been discovered, including:

- missing information
- counterfeit documentation (see example to the right)
- misleading documentation purporting to show required compliance
- documentation showing compliance with standards that are for countries outside of the UK/EU (which do not meet our requirements)



Where face masks or other PPE being imported through Heathrow could not be shown to be safe as PPE and could not satisfactorily be repurposed as non-protective ‘barrier masks’ for general public use they were denied entry into the UK.

**Food Standards** - After a delay related to Covid, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) food standards pilot scheme started in January 2021 and we are working on the new approach this needs relating to the interventions we will carry out to achieve compliance in food businesses. The main challenge has been to develop remote interventions rather than physical visits in the context of the Covid situation. We are currently also discussing some targeted sampling with the FSA.

We have been able to take food samples either online or in limited cases in person, supporting nine Public Analyst sampling projects. This has resulted in a number of minor non-compliances that have been addressed with the relevant food businesses. One more serious issue regarding excessive levels of ochratoxin in a black pepper was found and resulted in the food business reviewing its control systems as the contaminant can cause kidney damage in humans.

**Nitrous oxide issues** - We have carried out work with the police around the alleged supply of nitrous oxide by several shops. Usually supplied in small metal cannisters for food use, if nitrous oxide is sold for purposes other than that an offence may be committed. The visits produced illegal sales of nitrous oxide cannisters and also found counterfeit alcohol and illicit tobacco being sold by the same business. The potential offences are currently being investigated.

**Animal Health work** - The Service continues to engage with farmers to ensure livestock are looked after appropriately. During the year two newsletters aimed at the farming community have been produced covering issues such as avian flu and support networks available to them particularly during this difficult period. Work on updating contingency plans for disease outbreaks has taken place in partnership with colleagues in the Resilience teams.

**Illicit Tobacco** - This work is covered in more detail in a separate paper. Plans are in place for more work in this area shortly after restrictions are eased after the current lockdown.

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**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**
**TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE**
**DATE: 24 MARCH 2021**
**LEAD OFFICER: STEVE RUDDY**  
**HEAD OF TRADING STANDARDS**
**SUBJECT: TRADING STANDARDS COVID RESPONSE**
**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Responding to issues posed by the Covid pandemic have been high priority for Trading Standards during this year.

This report discusses the priorities within this work, what the Service has done to respond and other impacts of the pandemic on the work of the Service.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that the Trading Standards Joint Committee notes the report.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Joint Committee is required by the Inter Authority Agreement which underpins the service to ensure effective performance of the Service. This report explains what unplanned work was required and why, as well as considering the impact of this work upon other priorities for the Service.

**DETAILS:**
**Response Priorities:**

1. The main priorities during the Covid outbreak have continued to be:
  - Preventing harm from Covid related scams
  - Preventing harm from unsafe goods, including Personal, Protective Equipment (PPE), especially via Heathrow and being brought into use by the Logistics team in Surrey
  - Supporting businesses by providing advice needed for the changing conditions (e.g. supply chain shortages)
  - Shared enforcement of the Business Closures legislation with Environmental Health and Police partners.
2. These priorities have remained constant though the level of work being done to deliver each one at any given time has varied with the changing situation.

### **Preventing harm from Covid related scams:**

3. The Covid pandemic opened the floodgates for scammers to prey on all members of society in a number of different guises. This was a high risk for our most vulnerable residents who had been previously targeted. By pro-actively contacting these most vulnerable residents we were able to provide regular and consistent messages and reassurance in an attempt to safeguard them from further victimisation. During the first lockdown we carried out intensive (at least weekly) contact with 300 people identified as the most vulnerable to scams. Our data showed confidence that this regular and ongoing contact had reduced their susceptibility to scams. During the summer we reduced this level of intense contact with the vast majority of these people. When a specific risk is identified in a local area (e.g. a doorstep crime incident or a scam is occurring in the same locality) we contact vulnerable residents to provide support and safeguarding messages. In the past few weeks, we have re-contacted all these people. We are pleased to report that for the vast majority their awareness of scams still remains high and we are reassured that they do not need ongoing contact. We continue to work intensively with a handful of individuals as part of our more usual prevention work. More detail including a case study is in the Prevention Report.
4. Considering the wider community, we continue to put out very regular information through our social media and other channels including press releases to warn people of Covid and vaccine related scams which has excellent reach and has been well picked up by the media.
5. In addition to ensuring that residents and businesses are aware of the latest scams circulating, we have also taken action where businesses have not approached their response to Covid legally. A specific example of this occurred following the initial Covid lockdown in March 2020. Trading Standards received a number of complaints from consumers in relation to a travel company based in Surrey. The Company provide consumers with airport transfers and provide this service in a large number of destinations around the world.
6. As a result of Covid, consumers were unable to travel so had therefore contacted the Company to cancel their bookings. The Company initially refused to provide monetary refunds and were only offering credits to be used within the following 12 months. Customers were also having issues in contacting the Company. Trading Standards continued to receive complaints into the Summer of 2020.
7. During the pandemic guidance was produced by The Competition and Markets Authority. (CMA) remains of the view that a consumer will generally be entitled to a refund when they have paid money in advance for services or goods that cannot be provided because of the coronavirus pandemic.
8. Officers initiated contact with the Company and provided comprehensive advice. The Company agreed to comply and also agreed to continue to work with Trading Standards in resolving any complaints. So far, as a result of Trading Standards intervention, consumers have been provided £4896.51 in refunds.

## **Preventing harm from unsafe goods, including PPE, especially via Heathrow and being brought into use by the Logistics team in Surrey**

9. Assessing the safety of PPE was a heavily intensive task in April/May/June. Thereafter it has lessened significantly as supplies within the UK have stabilised and there has been less need for rapid, air freighted, imports however there continues to be an ongoing lower level need. After reviewing over 5 million items, over 1.2 million unsafe or non-compliant products were stopped from entering the supply chain by the Service with an estimated impact to society of over £40m. These products were mainly face masks and other protective equipment related to the outbreak of Covid.

## **Shared enforcement of the Business Closures legislation with Environmental Health and Police partners**

10. Business closure legislation was introduced as part of the measures to help reduce the venues at which the coronavirus could spread.
11. For most of the past year what are regarded as essential businesses, such as shops selling food, have been allowed to stay open. Other types of businesses have been required to either close or adopt a click and collect method of operation. Our remit has been concentrated on this business closures aspect but working in partnership has been vital as other measures have also been in place to restrict the spread of the virus, such as restrictions on social gatherings. Often situations have involved the range of various controls, for instance people gathering in pubs.
12. During the year we have adopted the national police strategy of beginning with engagement, then explain, moving to encourage and then enforce as a proportionate response to the regulatory work. This strategy has been particularly important as the regulations have been changing frequently, and some businesses have found it hard to understand what the latest requirements on them were so have been able to be brought into compliance using the early stages of the strategy without the need to move to enforcement.
13. An example of this related to car wash businesses which have been a constant source of challenge during all lockdowns. Officers of the service have liaised with our Environmental Health and police colleagues to work with car washes to ensure they are compliant and on the whole this has been successful. Our Environmental Health colleagues have provided very positive feedback for the liaison and the coordinating work one of our officers has carried out with car wash businesses.
14. Our graduated approach to enforcement is illustrated by one particular car wash business that despite receiving extensive advice and appearing to accept closure was captured in operation by police body cameras. This was shared with us and we issued a prohibition notice, the breach of which could result in a fixed penalty. The business has now complied.
15. The level of this work has fluctuated with the changes in restrictions. Each lockdown and tier of restrictions has placed different requirements on businesses, and legislation has been amended whilst in force to make further changes as challenges and unintended consequences become apparent. Given the nature of the situation the legislation has often been laid with only a

few hours' notice, so ensuring that officers are aware of the latest legislation has been an ongoing challenge.

16. At times business restrictions enforcement has led to a high level of work. In part this has been because of confusion within the business community and in part due to some businesses and sectors/trade bodies pushing the boundaries of the legislation to maximise their trade (a situation seen much more rarely in the first lockdown).
17. In November to support business restrictions work, and the work being done by Environmental Health, Buckinghamshire used Covid funding to employ Trading Standards contractors for a few weeks to do a high volume of visits to businesses to inform them of the latest requirements (to address the confusion) and to assess compliance, which at that point was found overall to be very high with just a few businesses and business sectors not complying without rigorous advice. During this period the contractors assisted with over 6,000 inspections.
18. In January there was a national concern whether the practices of essential retailers and the behaviour of their customers had deteriorated, as shopping was been identified as a source of infection. This led to a range of work in both Counties and nationally, aimed at improving levels of Covid security particularly in supermarkets including writing to supermarkets, engaging with their Primary Authority Partners, and making visits to around 45 supermarkets to engage with them about their covid security practices.
19. The form of complaints or advice requests into the Service about business restrictions have varied, with proportionately more requests from businesses for advice being received in the first lockdown, whereas the level of complaints about businesses operating has been reasonably consistent (in proportion to the length of the lockdown) for each one. To date we have received, and responded to, over 440 complaints about businesses trading contrary to the requirements.
20. To further assist in understanding where problems are occurring so that resources can be targeted at addressing them, a web page for people to report problems was developed and went live in January, publicised heavily by the Director of Public Health in Surrey. This has generated a steady flow of concerns being raised particularly in the Surrey area which Trading Standards either deal with directly or pass to the most appropriate service. To the end of February 160 reports had been received through this form, but many identified multiple issues of concern including: staff not wearing face masks; public not wearing face masks; businesses remaining open during lockdown; lack of social distancing; allegations of staff testing Covid positive and continuing to work. We continue to work with partners to share information that it is appropriate for them to consider and/or respond to – for example complaints regarding the wearing of face masks by shoppers are passed to the Police for information.
21. Linked to enforcement work the Service has responded to give feedback back to central government on where restrictions could be altered to have a greater impact or be more enforceable, and we have seen some changes in the legislation which appear to respond to some of these suggestions.

22. Further funding has recently been allocated by Surrey from its' Contain Outbreak Management Fund for the ongoing enforcement issues related to Covid in Surrey, and the Service has engaged two contractors (1.4 FTE) to assist with this over the coming months. They will continue to work closely with Environmental Health colleagues to maximise the effectiveness of our enforcement response.

**Supporting businesses by providing advice needed for the changing conditions (e.g. supply chain shortages)**

23. As mentioned above this work has fluctuated with the overall situation. Panic buying just before and at the start of the first lockdown caused some supply chain issues and generated many queries to us from businesses. During the first lockdown 100 requests for advice about Covid related issues were responded to from businesses who were proactively contacting us. Since the end of the first lockdown we have responded to a further 92 Covid related requests from businesses.
24. Changes required for import/export of goods as the transition period of the UK's exit from the EU came to an end, and at the ongoing change points also tends to generate queries from businesses. Perhaps because of the changing market conditions, at times we have received small spikes in advice requests from new businesses. Therefore, whilst Covid related requests have settled back to some extent, overall the work to support to businesses remains at a relatively high level.

**Work paused**

25. Some of the Service's work has been paused or altered during the most stringent national lockdowns. The reasons for this (and for some activities several of these reasons applied) include:
- Work not able to be done at a suitable distance, especially relevant in the tightest stages of restrictions
  - Businesses not being open, or operating in very different ways
  - Guidance from central government advising us to stop certain activities, e.g. the Food Standards Agency re planned inspections of food businesses
  - Work that is usually done alongside partners who had other priorities, or were unable to carry out the work at a safe distance, or had made decisions to suspend their activities
  - Our priorities, and resources, being temporarily elsewhere
26. The fluctuating situation means that there is still some impact of these issues, and by the end of the year we will not have delivered what we would have done without Covid. This is reflected in the performance seen within the separate Performance Paper. There remains significant disruption to the criminal justice system with court trials being severely restricted. We anticipate that this will last well into next year and the knock on may last into the following year too, adversely affecting the speed of our cases and changing the profile of legal costs. Risk assessments are in place now for much of this work and where it links with the needs of the situation and the Service priorities we have found ways to deliver much of what we need to do - although at somewhat differently than in previous years.

## **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHLG) Review**

27. MHCLG are currently reviewing the impact of Covid and Brexit on local authority Regulatory services, in particular Environmental Health and Trading Standards services. Work has only recently begun and 5 workstreams have been created and are due to report in July:

- a) Forward look 2021 – including ongoing pressures from Covid, Brexit, and any planned new responsibilities for regulatory services – aim is to increase co-ordination of new burdens to reduce concurrent impacts on Local Authorities
- b) Backlogs – particularly the impact of Covid – aim is to ensure backlogs are managed pragmatically to reduce pressure on Local Authorities as far as possible.
- c) Resourcing, capacity and qualifications – the LGA are helping to co-ordinate this workstream, and both Trading Standards and Environmental Health professional bodies will also be involved. This is may well have important longer term implications. The aim is to increased skilled capacity for regulatory services teams.
- d) Cost recovery and non-compliance charging –The aim is to increase sustainability of cost recovery / charging for regulatory services
- e) Champion/sponsor in Government. The aim is to ensure clear representation of the professions across Government. Currently there is no single clear focus for the wide range of issues dealt with by these regulatory services.

### **CONSULTATION:**

28. No external consultation has taken place.

### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

29. All significant risks affecting the service (including those related to Covid) are regularly considered by the management team (two monthly for red and amber risks, 6 monthly for green risks).

30. Where risks become higher, these are shared with the Trading Standards Board for awareness and discussion.

### **FINANCIAL & VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS**

31. Funding has been received for enforcement work from both Council's Covid related grants from central Government, for example from the Covid Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) in Surrey. Funding has also been received from a central Government grant for Lost Income.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

32. Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the Criminal Justice system, delaying trials and cases during the year. We anticipate that the impacts will continue to be felt throughout the coming year.

## **EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY**

33. The performance being reported will not impact on residents or staff with different protected characteristics, as such an Equality Impact Assessment has not been included.

## **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

34. Performance continues to be reviewed by the Service Management team and by the Joint Service Board.

## **17.0 REPORT DETAILS**

### **Contact Officer(s):**

Mr Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards 01372 371730  
Mrs Amanda Poole, Assistant Head of Trading Standards 07984 458 679

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### **Consulted: None**

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### **Annexes:**

None

### **Sources/background papers:**

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**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE**

**DATE: 24 MARCH 2021**

**LEAD OFFICER: DAVID PICKERING**

**SUBJECT: TRADING STANDARDS TOBACCO WORK**

**SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

The Children and Young Person's (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 requires Local Authorities to consider, at least once in every period of twelve months, the extent to which it is appropriate to carry out enforcement action to ensure that the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, are effected. This seeks to prohibit the sale of cigarettes and associated items, such as nicotine delivery systems, to persons under the age of 18. This duty relates to tobacco enforcement only.

The Service undertakes work in this area supporting the delivery of the Public Health improvement outcomes and responsibilities that relate to the use of tobacco in order to help people to live healthy lifestyles; make healthy choices and reduce health inequalities.

This report considers the Service's work in relation to tobacco and associated products and is not restricted to the potential sale to children and young people.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that:

The Joint Committee notes and considers the report as a reflection of activity over the financial year 2020 – 2021 and endorses continued enforcement activities which will be undertaken in 2021– 2022.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

The Children and Young Person's (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 requires Local Authorities to consider, at least once in every period of twelve months, the extent to which it is appropriate to carry out enforcement action to ensure that the provisions of the Children and Young Persons 1933 Act, are effected.

## DETAILS:

1. To ensure coherence and to maximise the impact of our work, Trading Standards link closely to Public Health led strategies to reduce tobacco consumption. The Trading Standards role is mainly in relation to tackling supply. However increasing levels of innovation in the alternatives to tobacco, such as e cigarettes, continue to provide constant challenges to us when assessing how the legislation applies to them. The Service has also facilitated links to be made between Surrey and Buckinghamshire Public Health teams to share information and good practice. We also link into the regional tobacco groups and the Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) led Department of Health and Social Care funded national initiatives
2. In Surrey, Trading Standards chair the Tobacco Alliance. This group of partners oversee the delivery of the Public Health Tobacco Control Strategy for Surrey and reports back to the Health & Wellbeing Board. With the ambition for Surrey to have the lowest smoking prevalence in England, the Priorities include, among others; “helping young people to be tobacco free”; “tackling illicit tobacco” and “raising the profile of tobacco control”.

In partnership with our Public Health colleagues the remit of the group has been extended recently to include alcohol issues as there are common areas of concern.

The Surrey Strategy can be found at:

<https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/your-health/smoking/smokefree-surrey/tobacco-control-strategy-for-surrey>

The Strategy for 2021-2026 is being developed and will consider the priorities in the new national strategy (when released) as well as local ones.

Progress against these priorities was reported to the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2020. Details can be found at this address (page 92):

[Item 6 - Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy Highlight Report.pdf \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

The Buckinghamshire Tobacco Control Strategy “Towards a smoke free generation” was launched in June 2019 and we are supporting this by tackling the supply of illicit tobacco and supporting the Alliance group:

<https://www.loc-net.org.uk/media/6836/buckinghamshire-tobacco-control-strategy-2019-2024.pdf>

The four main themes of the Buckinghamshire Strategy are Prevention First, Supporting smokers to quit, Eliminating variations in smoking rates and effective enforcement, with an overall focus on key groups.

3. Tobacco use among young people is considered as risk-taking behaviour (by themselves as much as anyone else) and may be seen therefore as gateway-behaviour for other risk taking activities. These would include experimenting with

alcohol and other illicit substances when this is combined with carrying offensive weapons and misuse of fireworks the resulting anti-social behaviour adversely affects how safe people feel in their own communities.

4. Sales of illicit tobacco facilitate a cheap way to start or continue smoking and as such needs to be minimised to reduce this impact. In addition, legitimate businesses are disadvantaged threatening small businesses in the local economy.

<https://www.illicit-tobacco.co.uk/problem/illicit-tobacco/>

5. There is evidence that the supply of illicit can be linked to organised crime and we work in partnership with the police to ensure appropriate dissemination of intelligence

[https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/mr\\_arndt\\_sinn\\_speech.pdf](https://www.eesc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/files/mr_arndt_sinn_speech.pdf)

6. The programme for the financial year 2020/2021 was as follows:-

**6.1. Continue to participate in those new projects and initiatives that fit within our enforcement activities outlined above together with our own initiatives where they are felt necessary.**

- The impact of the Covid lockdowns since March 2020 had a significant impact on our ability to carry out physical visits to businesses. We had to postpone planned visits with the sniffer dogs. We did however carry out 24 covert visits to attempt purchases and obtain intelligence about methods of selling illicit tobacco and will use this in the future to target potential sellers. We used intelligence to target the visits and one premise we had previously prosecuted refused to sell citing the trouble he had previously been in for selling illegal tobacco.
- The Court system was also affected but we did have two cases that were concluded.

The first case was heard in October 2020. A business in Chesham was visited in May 2019 and a large quantity of tobacco was discovered in the shop that was not labelled in accordance with current legislative requirements. The illegal tobacco seized from the shop. Ten charges covered the possession for supply of tobacco that was not correctly labelled with the necessary statutory warnings, not in the correct packaging, and a small number of counterfeit tobacco products. In total there were 259 packets of cigarettes and 55 pouches of hand rolling tobacco that were not correctly labelled and were in non-compliant packaging; there were also 14 packets of cigars that were not labelled with the statutory health warnings. Most the items were non-complaint due to their age – they had been compliant at the point of manufacture but had become non-complaint more than three years ago following amendments to the law. There were also a fairly small number of items that were genuine but not intended for supply in the UK and consequently any warnings that they bore were not in English, as required by the legislation. The business owner pleaded guilty to offences under the

Trade Marks Act for the counterfeit products; the Tobacco and Related Products 2016; and the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations 2015 and was fined £537 (reduced from £807 for credit awarded due to the guilty pleas). The magistrates ordered the forfeiture and destruction of all of the tobacco products and awarded full prosecution costs.

The second case was heard in February 2021. It resulted from intelligence that was received by the service that a business in High Wycombe was selling illicit tobacco from a van parked outside the shops. TSO's visited the premises on the December 2019 with a test purchaser who purchased 6 packets of non-compliant cigarettes.

- TSO's then revisited the shop later in December as part of a tobacco operation day. Officers searched the van and found 188 packets of 20 cigarettes and 76 pouches of hand rolling tobacco. All items from the initial inspection did not contain the correct health warnings and were not in the required coloured packaging. 36 packets were identified as counterfeit. All items were confirmed as not intended for sale in the UK. The own pleaded guilty to all 8 offences and the magistrates commented that there was a degree of planning as he was keeping them in the back of his van and not on the premises. The business owner was reluctant to give over the van keys to officers when they first requested which shows non-cooperation and an attempt by him to conceal the evidence. There was an element of financial gain and the possibility of putting other people at risk. This behaviour could adversely impact other legitimate local businesses. The Court noted that this was the owners first offence and that the shop has been running for 10 years with no previous breaches and credit was given for a guilty plea. In total the fine was £1,840 and costs were awarded. Forfeiture and destruction was granted for all items.

## **6.2. Promote the education message about the harm illicit tobacco causes and the smoking cessation message and gather any intelligence about sales of illicit tobacco to identify sources.**

- We have used social media to promote messages about smoking cessation and illicit tobacco. The planned physical roadshows were cancelled
- We are working with Buckinghamshire and Surrey Public Health teams on the 'Illegal Tobacco - keep it out' campaign to be advertised via social media. This provides a dedicated reporting email for consumers that feeds directly into TSSE regional intel officer. It is currently planned to be rolled out soon after April 2021.

## **6.3. We will continue to support the Tobacco Alliance groups in both counties**

- A team manager continues to Chair the Surrey group and a team supervisor participates in the Buckinghamshire group.

- We share good practice between the groups and liaise on possible common areas of work

**6.4. Continue to use local, regional and national intelligence to ensure we target our interventions and resources appropriately**

We have continued to use information and intelligence gathered from a variety of sources to inform our work relating to illicit tobacco and tobacco related issues generally, including intelligence gathering test purchasing operations to enable us to focus our time with the tobacco sniffer dog most effectively.

**6.5. Seek licence reviews through the relevant District Council when appropriate.**

Prosecutions for illicit tobacco can be used to add additional conditions onto the premises licence including the installation of CCTV at the premises, price labels on the alcohol to include the name of the shop, or the imposition of clear and stringent stock control measures.

**6.6. Continue to support retailers by promoting the use of the Challenge 25 Training Pack and advising traders about legislative requirements in this area.**

This would be done in response to requests for advice on underage sales legislation and also will be promoted proactively during visits to traders for other reasons.

**6.7. Continue to ensure that the restrictions of both price marking and visual display requirements of tobacco products in retail premises are adhered to.**

Physical visits were restricted last year but when it was possible (visits dealing with fireworks selling for instance) officers checked this as part of the visit. No issues were found.

**7. For 2021-22 we will:**

**7.1. Contribute to the Surrey and Buckinghamshire Tobacco Control Strategies by taking action to reduce the supply of illicit tobacco through intelligence and enforcement.**

- a. We will gather local intelligence, use appropriate enforcement action against suppliers, share intelligence across relevant enforcement agencies to tackle organised distribution networks, repeat the illicit tobacco campaign, gather local intelligence and enforcing regulation on nicotine containing devices, raise the profile of the issue through local publicity and participate when relevant in nationally organised campaigns.
- b. We will liaise with the fire service about the use of their sniffer dogs to identify sellers of illicit tobacco

- c. We will participate in a joint operation with the HMRC to identify and take appropriate action against sellers of illicit tobacco
- d. Once lockdown restrictions are lifted we will carry out work to identify if there are issues with providers of shisha tobacco in both authorities

**7.2. Promote the education message about the harm illicit tobacco causes and the smoking cessation message and gather any intelligence about sales of illicit tobacco to identify sources.**

- a) We will work with Public Health to achieve the best outcome we can from an educational perspective in particular identifying the best use of social media to target messaging.
- b) We will continue to liaise with both Councils communications teams to publicise our work about tobacco issues.

**7.3. We will continue to support the Tobacco Alliance groups in both counties**

We will continue to Chair the Surrey Alliance group and will participate in meetings organised for both Councils. We will work with partners on the groups to deliver the agreed strategies to reduce smoking prevalence rates in both counties.

**7.4. Continue to use local, regional and national intelligence to ensure we target our interventions and resources appropriately**

We will continue to explore ways to:

- improve intelligence sharing between relevant partners;
- upgrade intelligence from all viable sources; and
- explore alternative means of detecting sales (other than by test purchases)

**7.5. Seek licence reviews through the relevant District/Unitary Council when appropriate.**

Prosecutions for illicit tobacco can be used to add additional conditions onto the premises licence including the installation of CCTV at the premises, price labels on the alcohol to include the name of the shop, or the imposition of clear and stringent stock control measures.

**7.6. Continue to monitor the market for alternatives to tobacco products, such as vaping products, to assess potential risks and look for solutions to ensure any risks to consumer safety is minimised**

- a) As well as work relating to reducing the supply of illicit tobacco, we will continue to assess appropriate interventions relating to tobacco alternatives such as vaping.

- a. There is continuing uncertainty and lack of confidence in agencies advising about smoking cessation and we can support them by carrying out testing of liquids and equipment relating to vaping to ensure they comply with relevant legislation.
- b. We will continue to liaise with partner agencies, in particular about the use of CBD oil in vaping liquids and any regulatory issues this raises

#### **CONSULTATION:**

8. Public Health teams in Surrey and Buckinghamshire have been consulted with and have contributed to this report.

#### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

9. We are supporting an important strand of tobacco reduction strategies by seeking to reduce the supply of tobacco products. If we are unable to carry out this work the effectiveness of this will be reduced and it is more likely that such products will be available to children and young people.

#### **Financial and Value for Money Implications:**

10. The work in this area is carried out by a number of officers as a small part of their wider role. At times work in this area, such as advice to businesses, is combined with other visits that officers are carrying out to the same premises or area to maximise efficiency. This report is suggesting that the Service broadly maintains its approach to this work and therefore there is no additional financial implication beyond that which is already committed.

#### **Legal Implications:**

11. As outlined in the report, there is a requirement for Local Authorities to consider carryout enforcement actions at least once in every twelve-month period, to ensure that the provisions of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933, are effected. The report outlines the enforcement action taken and the legal consequence to such action.

#### **Equalities and Diversity:**

12. Tobacco consumption is disproportionately prevalent in particular socio-economic groups; tackling tobacco consumption has a positive impact in helping tackle health inequalities. There is no likely negative disproportionate impact arising from the work described in this report on people with protected characteristics.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

13. This is set out in section 8 above.

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**Contact Officer:**

David Pickering, Trading Standards Manager, Regulation 01372 388779

**Consulted:**

**Annexes:** None

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**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL AND SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL****TRADING STANDARDS JOINT COMMITTEE****DATE: 24 MARCH 2021****LEAD OFFICER: GINA GREEN**  
**TRADING STANDARDS MANAGER, PROTECTION****SUBJECT: PREVENTION WORK UNDERTAKEN BY TRADING STANDARDS****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Prevention is a key focus of the work Trading Standards does to protect individuals, communities and businesses from harm and financial loss. We aim to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities through targeted support, education and consumer empowerment. There are a number of different strategies employed to achieve this focus including partnership work, safeguarding, call blockers, media and communications and implementation of national initiatives.

The information provided shows the range of work the Service has undertaken in the past year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

It is recommended that the Trading Standards Joint Committee notes the attached report on the Prevention work undertaken by the Service.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Joint Committee is required by the Inter Authority Agreement which underpins the service to ensure effective performance of the Service. This report focuses on the work of the Service in one of its' key priority areas.

**DETAILS:**

1. The report attached includes information on:
  - Immediate response to Covid-19
  - Safeguarding phone calls
  - Call blockers
  - Media and communications
  - Implementation of National Initiatives
  - Impact of interventions

**CONSULTATION:**

2. No external consultation has taken place.

#### **RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:**

3. All significant risks affecting the service (which could include any items including anything related to Prevention work) are regularly considered by the management team (two monthly for red and amber risks, 6 monthly for green risks).
4. Where risks become higher, these are shared with the Trading Standards Board for awareness and discussion.

#### **FINANCIAL & VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS:**

5. The Service has delivered all elements of the business case.

#### **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

6. The report makes a number of references to relevant legal processes and proceedings that the Service has been involved in over the last year. There are no other specific legal issues that need to be drawn to the attention of the Committee.

#### **EQUALITIES & DIVERSITY:**

7. The performance being reported will not impact on residents or staff with different protected characteristics, as such an Equality Impact Assessment has not been included.

#### **WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:**

8. Performance continues to be reviewed by the Service Management team and by the Joint Service Board.

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#### **Contact Officer(s):**

Mrs Gina Green, Trading Standards Manager  
Mr Steve Ruddy, Head of Trading Standards 01372 371730

#### **Consulted: N/A**

#### **Annexes:**

Annex A: Prevention work undertaken by Bucks & Surrey Trading Standards  
Annex B: National Trading Standards Call Blocking Report 2019-20  
Annex C: Impact of Call Blockers on Users Well Being Report 2020

#### **Sources/background papers: N/A**

Annex A

**Prevention work undertaken by Trading Standards**

Prevention is a key focus of the work Trading Standards does to protect individuals, communities and businesses from harm and financial loss. We aim to improve the health and wellbeing of people and communities through targeted support, education, intervention and consumer empowerment. There are a number of different strategies employed to achieve this focus including partnership work, safeguarding, call blockers, media and communications and implementation of national initiatives.

**Immediate Response to Covid-19:**

Due to Covid-19 face to face interventions to victims of fraud and scams were no longer possible. The Prevention Team immediately adapted and created a letter and information pack which was sent to all residents identified as being vulnerable to scams.



Working with members of the Surrey Local Resilience Forum and Buckinghamshire Covid 19 Food Cell, the Prevention Team arranged for scam and doorstep crime sticker packs to be widely distributed, including accompanying food parcels sent to shielded residents. District and Borough Councils also used local food banks and meals on wheels services to share this information.

The Team also worked closely with many other partners to share scam prevention messages. These included organisations such as The Council of Christian and Muslim Relations, Crimestoppers, Thames Valley Police and local Neighbourhood Watch.

We are now part of the Neighbourhood Alert system. This is a secure, web-based messaging system which enables Trading Standards to deliver targeted, relevant messages to specific groups of users in local communities, or broad messages nationwide. The system is used by 23 Police Forces in England, as well as several Fire & Rescue services, Police Commissioners, local Authorities and the Neighbourhood Watch Network. The system typically delivers over 8 million secure messages a month to over 700,000 registered members.

Over 55,000 scam packs and 55,000 doorstep crime packs distributed

**Safeguarding Phone Calls:**





The information packs sent to vulnerable residents were supplemented with weekly telephone calls. The aim was to prevent fraud, but they also provided much needed wellbeing support – especially for those socially isolated or shielding. It enabled dynamic interventions in incidents, including intercepting and returning money to victims, and provided an opportunity to install call blocking technology.

## Case Study Mr B

In 2019, Mr B had been defrauded out of £70,000 due to investment fraud. Officers from Trading Standards persevered in challenging circumstances to support him and increase his resilience to fraud.

In April 2020 Mr B was one of the 300 residents trading standards began calling on a weekly basis. Recently bereaved and grieving and socially isolated with no support network it quickly became apparent that Mr B was struggling with his mental health, made worse by repeated and threatening phone calls from scammers. The only food he had was bread and milk and he was living off a box of cereal. More urgently he was contemplating suicide.

The Trading Standards Officer assigned to the case contacted key partners to raise urgent concerns. Unfortunately, Mr B was not on the shielded patients list and had fallen between the cracks. Thanks to our intervention Mr B was contacted by Adult Social Care and local charity CHEER (Concern & Help for East Elmbridge Retired). Thanks to the amazing work of CHEER Mr B immediately received an emergency care package and funding was organised for him to receive meals on wheels 3 times a day. To help with his social isolation and grieving, Mr B not only received a weekly call from Trading Standards but also received phone calls twice a week from CHEER and their volunteers. Mr B also accepted the installation of a free call blocking device to prevent malicious cold calls reaching him.

Mr B continues to receive meals on wheels as well as weekly calls from Trading Standards and charity volunteers. A call blocking device has been installed (which he loves) and following ongoing support from Trading Standards, Mr B has had £25,000 worth of debt written off by his banks and has switched his utility company to get a cheaper tariff.

He continues to take one day at a time but says Trading Standards have turned his life around. He says he is now more confident to handle financial issues and is enjoying time in his garden and returning to his painting.



I have contacted my banks and they are returning £25,000 I thought I had lost forever, I couldn't have done it without you.

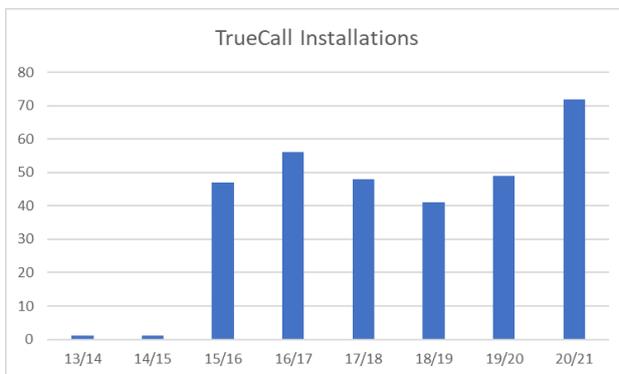


## Call Blockers

Call blockers are a key tool in stopping criminals accessing vulnerable residents in their own homes. To combat cold call fraud and to give residents peace of mind Buckinghamshire and Surrey Trading Standards provides and installs call blocking technology free of charge to vulnerable people who are being plagued by nuisance and scam calls. The retail cost of these units is £119.00 plus £9.99 delivery.



A trueCall call blocker is a piece of technology which connects between the phone and wall socket. It acts like a home receptionist, letting calls from trusted friends and family straight through, blocking unwelcome callers, and challenging unrecognised calls while providing a route for legitimate unknown callers access.



Total of 331 units installed  
 Of which 205 are active  
 224,232 nuisance calls blocked  
 42,971 scam calls blocked  
 99.7% of scam and nuisance calls blocked

Financial savings due to trueCall interventions can be divided into three categories:

Financial Savings  
**£512,746**

Healthcare & Health Related Quality of Life savings  
**£276,889**

Residential care cost savings  
**£13,034,515**

The cost benefit analysis on the project overall is 45:1

**Buckinghamshire and Surrey residents saved £45 for every £1 spent by the Service**



## Case Study Mrs E

Mrs E was a recently bereaved widow who was receiving cold calls from individuals posing as investment specialists. She was initially persuaded into 'investing' £5,000. The cold calls continued, and she handed over another £10,000. The cold calls continued incessantly, and Mrs E's daughter contacted Surrey Police in a very distressed state.

The case was referred to Trading Standards via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). The Trading Standards Prevention Team, working in partnership with Surrey Police immediately took steps to safeguard this vulnerable lady. A key part of this activity was to stop the cold calls.

Mrs E was an independent lady who was initially reluctant to the idea of installing a call blocker. She had been convinced that these 'investment traders' were genuine and was diligently keeping notes of her conversations. Trading Standards continued to support Mrs E and tirelessly to get her money returned to her.

A month later Mrs E contacted her Trading Standards case worker, she had received two very aggressive cold calls from the scammers demanding an additional £20,000 which had left her upset and very shaken. She asked for us to stop these calls and agreed to install a call blocker. The effect was immediate.

Mrs E was no longer plagued by cold calls and she was no longer afraid to answer the phone. With continued support from Trading Standards she even had £15,000 returned to her.

Extremely grateful and was not expecting that level of service

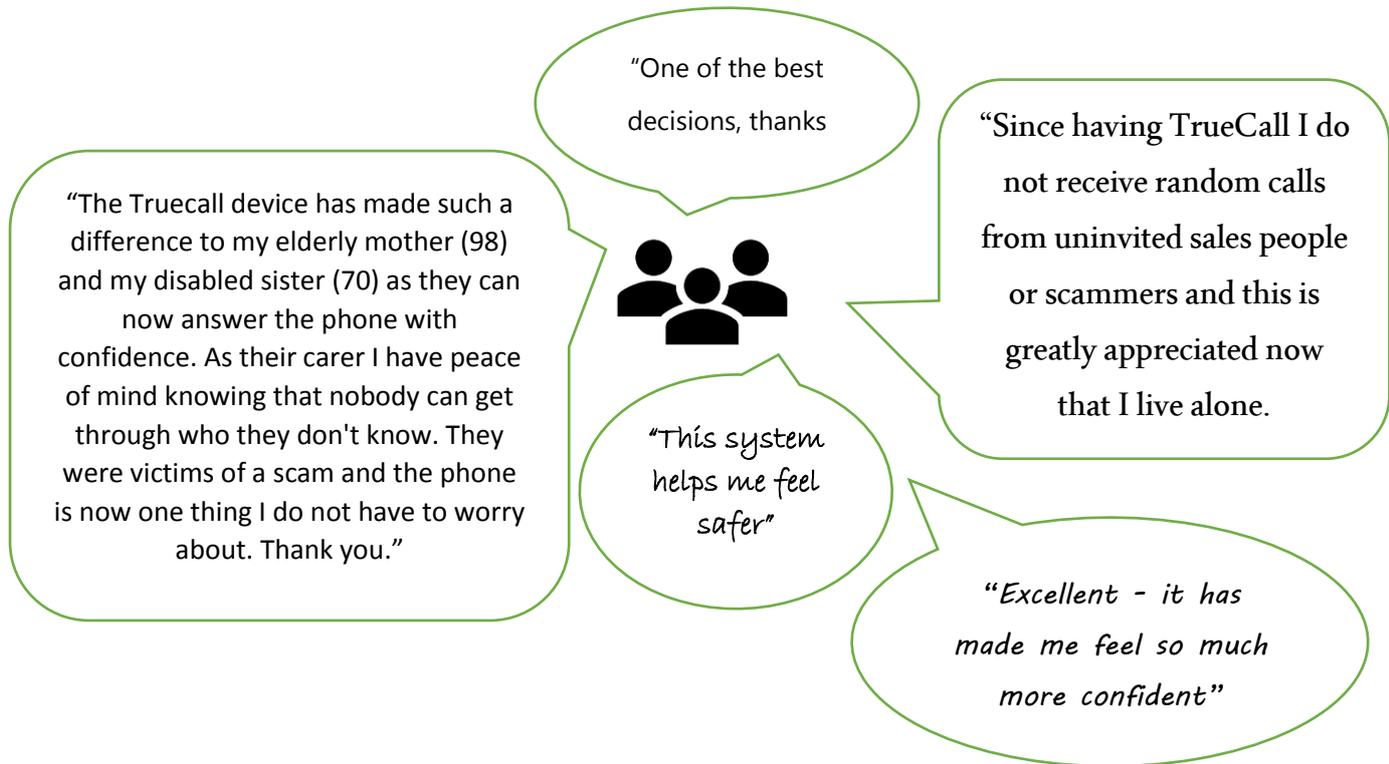


### Impact of Call Blockers

- 95% of the applicants who previously felt threatened or scared by scam or nuisance calls no longer felt this way.
- 100% of applicants surveyed at three months (who originally felt unsafe in their own home) felt safer due to having a call blocker installed.
- 99% of applicants felt happier they no longer receive scam or nuisance calls.
- 80% of applicants who were previously worried about losing money to scam and nuisance calls in the future no longer felt this way.
- 92% of applicants now say they no longer receive any scam or nuisance calls.
- 84% of applicants felt more confident in answering the phone knowing it wouldn't be a scam or nuisance call.



**Resident Feedback**



“One of the best decisions, thanks

“The Truecall device has made such a difference to my elderly mother (98) and my disabled sister (70) as they can now answer the phone with confidence. As their carer I have peace of mind knowing that nobody can get through who they don't know. They were victims of a scam and the phone is now one thing I do not have to worry about. Thank you.”

“Since having TrueCall I do not receive random calls from uninvited sales people or scammers and this is greatly appreciated now that I live alone.

“This system helps me feel safer”

“Excellent - it has made me feel so much more confident”

**Call Blocker Development**



**Buckinghamshire & Surrey**  
trading standards

**Are you worried about nuisance phone calls?**

Many of these calls are scams that aim to con people out of money. Unfortunately they're on the increase but a trueCall device will block nuisance and unwanted calls to give you peace and quiet at home, but still let your personalised trusted caller list through.

trueCall  
STOPS NUISANCE CALLS

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNCIL  
SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

Increase awareness of this initiative through proactive and targeted promotional activities

Develop and seek new opportunities to work with partners to extend the reach of the project to support more socially isolated people and include those with a diverse range of vulnerable characteristics.

Develop and implement the use of trueCall technology for mobile phones on a pilot basis.

## Media and Communications

The media is an important tool for our prevention work. We regularly use mediums including Facebook, twitter, press releases and our fortnightly TS Alerts.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic we have seen an increase in Covid related scams ranging from home testing kits, HMRC payments and vaccination scams.

Here are a few of the most popular press releases:

[Scams on the rise in the wake of Coronavirus | Surrey News \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

[Scammers prey on the vulnerable charging for vaccines they don't have and stealing financial data | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

[Covid-19 vaccine scams are targeting Surrey residents | Surrey News \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](#)

From April 2020 to December 2020 our Facebook total reach has been 755,214. This is compared to 531,731 for the whole of the previous year. A Facebook total reach is the number of people who had your page's post enter their screen. On the 15th September 2020 a post about an HMRC phishing email was shared 233 times and reached 25,178 people. On the 17th November 2020 a post about a doorstep scam against a young male was shared 143 times and reached 18,089 people.

Here is a link to our TS Alert newsletters:



<https://scc.newsweaver.co.uk/tradingstandards>

Social Media is integral to the work of the Prevention Team. Using all social media platforms and via our TS alert newsletter, sent to over 1,000 subscribers fortnightly, we provide information, guidance and alerts. Each of our TS Alert subscribers, such as Neighbourhood Watch, District and Borough Councils and charities, distributes the information throughout their own organisations and in turn their followers share it further.



<https://www.facebook.com/BucksSurreyTS>



[https://twitter.com/Bucks\\_Surreyts/](https://twitter.com/Bucks_Surreyts/)

During lockdown, one single message reached:

113,314 people via Facebook

88,600 people via Twitter



The work undertaken by the Team has generated a lot of media interest, affording us the opportunity to also provide advice and guidance via local and national television and radio.



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0007sxx>



## Implementation of National Initiatives

Friends Against Scams (FAS) is a National Trading Standards Scams Team initiative which aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering people to take a stand against scams. By attending a Friends Against Scams awareness session anyone can learn about the different types of scams and how to spot and support a victim. With increased knowledge and awareness, people can make scams part of everyday conversation with their family, friends and neighbours, which will enable them to protect themselves and others.



Scam Champions are the next level of intervention. Based on the Friends Against Scams training, Scam Champions are able to develop their own confidence to adopt and deliver Friends Against Scams Training directly to their communities or in their place of work. We have implemented this enhanced training to Surrey Police and Thames Valley Police and adult services in both counties.

Before Covid-19 training for these 2 initiatives was delivered face to face. Because of the restrictions this training is now delivered virtually on a monthly basis and has significantly increased the number of people we have been able to reach.

A Scam Marshal is any resident in the UK who has been targeted by a scam and now wants to fight back and take a stand against scams. Scam Marshals do this by sharing their own experiences, helping others to report and recognise scams and sending any scam mail that they receive to the National Trading Scams Team so that it can be utilised as evidence in future investigative and enforcement work. This scheme won the prestigious 'Outstanding Prevention Initiative' at the Tackling Economic Crime Awards (TECAs) in December.



We have recently set up a private Facebook group to enable our Friends Against Scams and Scam Champions to talk to each other in a safe space. Over 200 members are supporting each other by sharing ideas and tips and discussing the emerging scam trends.

Businesses Against Scams. In light of recent events concerning COVID-19, people are working from home more than ever. Increased stress, less opportunities to talk to colleagues and a different working environment are all things that criminals are using to their advantage to commit fraud. Employees are having to make decisions on their own without verification from their colleagues, making businesses more susceptible to scams and fraud. This initiative provides a number of resources that companies can share with their employees which



can educate them on a variety of common business related frauds, including grant and rebate scams, CEO fraud, invoice fraud and technical support scams.

Direct financial Savings for April - December 2020  
£481,006

Moving away from class room based training we now deliver these initiatives monthly on line which has significantly increased our reach.

20,075 Friends Against Scams  
132 Scam Champions  
102 Scam Marshalls  
50 Business Against Scams

SCAMBassadors are MPs, senior officials or someone who will use their influence to raise the profile of scams at a national level. They can raise the issue of scams as a key topic of concern in parliament and encourage their local authority to sign up to Friends Against Scams.)

If a business, organisation or charity would like to be involved, they can become a Friends Against Scams organisation by pledging to actively promote the initiative. The easiest way to do this is to make all employees Friends. Organisations may also wish to encourage their customers to become Friends as well.



In June 2020 Mr Steve Owen-Hughes, Director of Community Protection & Emergencies and SFRS Chief Fire Officer become a Scambassador, raising and promoting the work being done to educate and safeguard residents from fraud and scams. Soon after, SFRS was also recognised as an official Friends Against Scams Organisation.

4 SCAMBassadors  
9 Friends Against Scams Organisations



## Impact of our Interventions

As well as qualitative feedback from residents, some examples of which have been given throughout this report, we also consider the quantitative impact of our interventions. Using a tool developed by National Trading Standards, designed by economists and based on central Government Department approaches, we are able to calculate the economic and societal value of a variety of local authority trading standards interventions on scams. This tool looks at three different things:

- The Direct savings - for example on average one call blocker will block x number of scam attempts of which y number would be 'successful' causing a person to lose x pounds.
- The Health & Social Care savings – this begins to look at the impact on the person of being a victim of a scam and considers the known data about wider impacts on vulnerable victims. In particular, it considers the average increased needs for health and social care that have been shown to be required for such vulnerable victims.
- The Avoided Residential Care impact – this considers further impacts, and data showing an increased need (on average) for vulnerable victims of scam crimes.

This shows that between April and December the impact of our Scams interventions was:

**Direct & future financial savings for residents:**

**£922,367**

**Health & Social Care financial Impact:**

**£397,042**

**Avoided Residential Care Financial Impact:**

**£13,034,924**

For consistency with previous reporting, we show the combination of the first two of these figures as the headline financial impact of our scams prevention work i.e. **£1,319,409**



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National Trading Standards Scams Team

# Call Blocking

2019 - 2020



## Foreword

Scam and nuisance calls continue to be a blight for many people in society. It is estimated that between £5-10 billion is lost by UK consumers every year to fraud and scams<sup>1</sup>. People who are susceptible to scams due to their circumstances (for example, social isolation or declining health), are often targeted by criminals. Further to this, feelings of isolation and loneliness have been exacerbated due to the recent pandemic.

Scam and nuisance calls can affect people in many ways. These crimes often cause financial loss, emotional distress, social isolation, a loss of confidence, a feeling of embarrassment at having been scammed and sometimes, physical harm, due to poverty and stress.

This report highlights how important a call blocker is for individuals to defend themselves from these crimes. It demonstrates that installing a call blocker significantly increased applicants' wellbeing, blocks 99% of scam and nuisance calls and saves applicants and society £20,227,167.42.

This area of work continues to prove invaluable in protecting people from financial abuse.

**Louise Baxter, Head of the National Trading Standards Scams Team.**



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## Executive summary

The call blocker project was funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Since the start of the project until April 2020:

- **1,084** call blockers have been installed
- Over **99%** of scam and nuisance calls were blocked
- On average, applicants were receiving **23** scam and nuisance calls per month
- **99%** of applicants felt happier they no longer receive scam or nuisance calls

### Call blocker cost benefit analysis

- Total estimated saving = **£20,227,167.42**
- The cost of the Call Blocker Project 2019-2020 was **£640,000**.
- Therefore, for every **£1** spent, the project has saved consumers and society **£32**.
- The cost benefit ratio **32:1**

### Wellbeing study

Some applicants took part in an academic, ethically approved wellbeing study overseen by Bournemouth University. After installing a unit for three months:

- **96%** of all applicants reported a positive impact on their wellbeing
- All applicants reported a significant increase in their overall wellbeing
- The data suggests that a call blocker may be of particular benefit to socially isolated or vulnerable people

### Wellbeing cost benefit analysis

- Applying the wellbeing calculation method.
- **£2,318.48** wellbeing saving per person
- **£1,873,232.32** net financial value to all applicant's wellbeing

### Investigations

The data from the units identified criminals selling fake face masks during the pandemic. The closure of this telephone number resulted in an estimated saving of **£6,805,098.00**.

### Recommendations

- 1** There should be greater recognition of the impact that scam and nuisance calls have on wellbeing, regardless of whether there is actual engagement or any financial loss.
- 2** All regular landline users are likely to benefit from call blocker technology.
- 3** Call blockers should be made available to vulnerable individuals to support them to live independently - call blockers can be a vital part of a toolkit to support independent living and to safeguard vulnerable individuals from financial abuse.
- 4** Older people, those who self-identify as vulnerable, and individuals who live alone are most likely to benefit from the installation of a call blocker.
- 5** Further signposting would help provide clear guidance regarding the application for, and the potential benefits of, installing a call blocker.

## Scam and nuisance calls - what is the problem?

Telephone scams are a form of fraud where criminals contact people out of the blue by telephone or text message, often from a misleading or spoofed<sup>2</sup> telephone number.

Criminals use a combination of psychological tactics such as bullying, harassment, befriending or impersonation of officials to defraud people or offer 'too good to be true deals' to obtain personal and financial information.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provided funding in 2016 to the National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team for call blocking technology to help tackle this problem. Building on this previous work, the Government continued its commitment to combat scam and nuisance calls by providing further funding to supply and install additional call blockers for those in need.

To help combat the problem of misleading or spoofed telephone numbers, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is working with telecom companies to create a central database of verified phone numbers. This will assist with identifying the "real" number behind each phone call much more easily and isolate numbers that are not recognised as genuine.

To further protect consumers, updates have been made to existing legislation. The Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 (PECR) have been amended in 2018 to include the banning of cold calling by claims management services<sup>3</sup> and to introduce director liability for serious breaches of the marketing rules. In 2019, PECR incorporated the banning of cold calling by pension schemes in certain circumstances. Such amendments are a welcome addition in fighting scams and nuisance calls yet there is always more that can be done. Call blockers are a powerful preventative tool with which we can help empower people to take a stand against scams.

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## Call blocking technology

The call blocking units used in this project were the trueCall Secure Plus units<sup>4</sup>. The units filter unwanted scam and nuisance calls and stop them from getting through to the consumers landline. The unit allows the user to set a "trusted caller list" for friends, family members, doctors and any other trusted contacts. The unit plugs into an existing phone and phone line and can work alongside broadband or lifeline/pendant devices that are already installed.



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2 A spoofed telephone number is when a caller deliberately changes the telephone number and/or name relayed as the Caller ID information. They do this to either hide their identity or copy the phone number of a legitimate person or company.

3 Claims management services consist of advice or services in respect of claims for compensation, restitution, repayment or any other remedy for loss or damage, or in respect of some other obligation.

4 <https://www.truecall.co.uk/>

# The project



## Referrals

- Applications went live on the Friends Against Scams website<sup>6</sup>.
- Applications could be made by; individuals, on behalf of someone else, by a local authority or by a partner agency such as the police.

## Assessment

- Applicants were successful if they received scam or nuisance calls and/or their circumstances made them vulnerable to these types of calls.



## Installation

- The units could be self-installed or professionally installed by an engineer.
- An installation survey was completed by the applicant.

## Monitoring

- To assess the impact of the unit at three months, a member of the NTS Scams Team contacted the applicant to conduct a follow up survey relating to the unit.

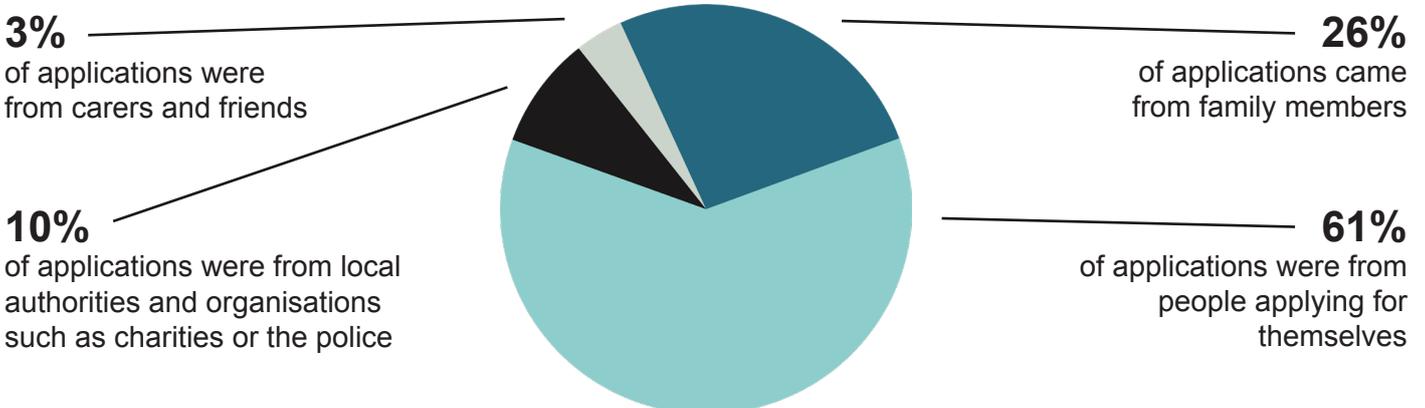


## Analysis

- The data from the units was analysed and shared with the investigations team to identify and disrupt the criminals.

## Where did the applications come from?

All 2,014<sup>5</sup> units were applied for within eight days of the project starting; an unprecedented level of requests - the demand for these units was exceptionally high. Applications were made from a variety of sources.



The average applicant was 75, female and applied for a unit for herself.

Despite not losing money to these crimes yet, some were concerned about losing money in the future.

<sup>5</sup> Since then 350 units have been returned and redeployed  
<sup>6</sup> <https://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/>

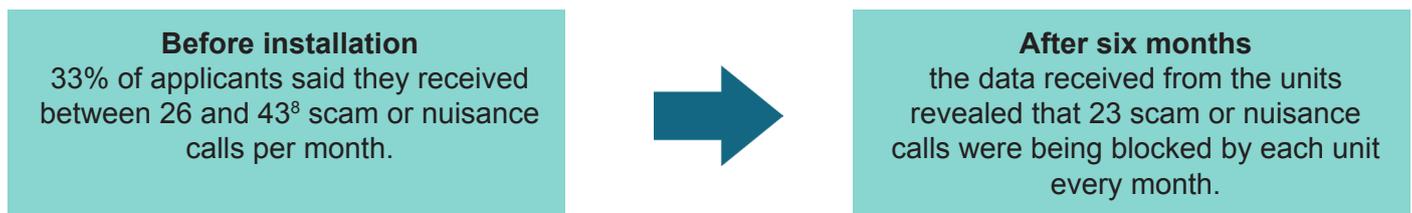
## Analysis

To assess the effectiveness of the unit, information was gathered from applicants before and after the installation of a unit. The below comparisons were made on:

- The number of scam or nuisance calls received before and after installing a unit;
- The number of scams or nuisance calls blocked;
- The financial detriment before the installation of a unit;
- The financial detriment after the installation of a unit;
- The impact on a person's emotions due to receiving scam and nuisance calls before the installation and at three months of having the unit.

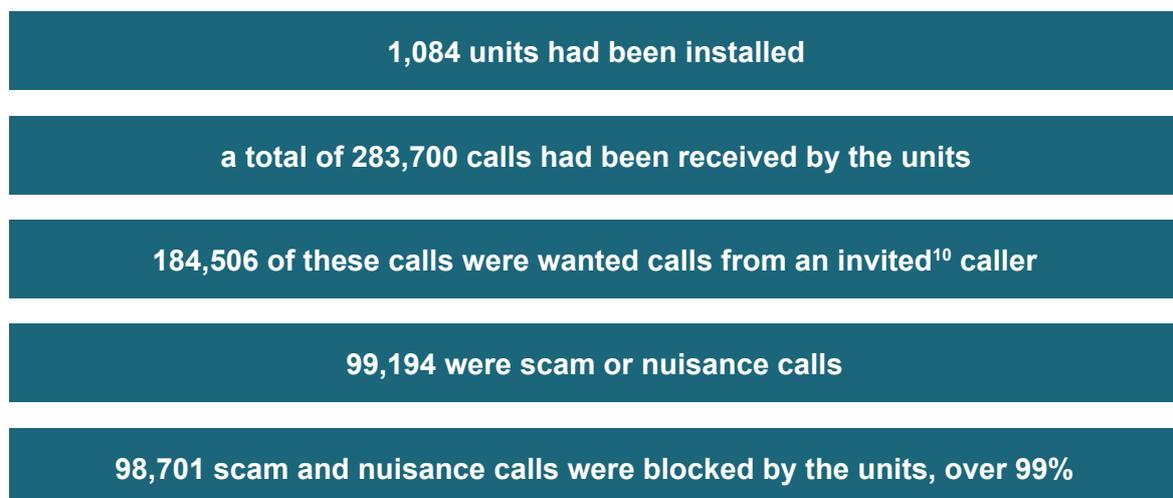
## Call analysis

A report<sup>7</sup> by Ofcom suggests that the average number of nuisance calls received by the general population per month is 7.4. The applicants in this project were receiving an average of 23 scam and nuisance calls per month, 16 more than the average general population. This higher figure shows that the units from this project were installed into the homes of those most in need of blocking these types of calls.



## How many calls did the units receive after the installation of a call blocker?

After six months<sup>9</sup>:



**Over 99% of scam and nuisance calls were blocked by the units**

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0033/159288/landline-nuisance-calls.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0033/159288/landline-nuisance-calls.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Received 6-10 calls per week, multiplied over a one-month period = 26-43 scam or nuisance calls per month.

<sup>9</sup> Applicants were surveyed at three months, but data calculated in this section is after six months of having the unit installed.

<sup>10</sup> An invited caller is someone the applicant knows or is expecting a call from or is on their trusted caller list.

## Financial savings

Applicants were asked questions about their experience of scam and nuisance calls before and after the unit was installed. This included financial loss at application and installation.

### Before the installation of a call blocker:

228 applicants stated they had lost money to scam and nuisance calls

76 applicants declared a financial figure lost to scam and nuisance calls which totalled £547,011.80

The average reported loss of these victims to scam and nuisance calls was £7,197.52<sup>11</sup>

One applicant had lost £100,000 to scam and nuisance calls

### After three months of using a call blocker:

The NTS Scams Team successfully telephone surveyed 529 applicants to find out their experience of using the unit.

All respondents reported no losses to scam or nuisance calls since the installation of the unit.

Of those surveyed at three months after installation, no applicants had lost money to scam or nuisance calls.

“Amazing! I was getting so many calls it was so bad. Before I was beginning to doubt myself and was uncomfortable and now, I feel myself again it’s really made a difference.”

- Jim



“My autistic son is able to answer the phone. He feels like his whole life is ‘lifted’ since the installation, not depressed anymore, more confident, safer in his home. Really happy.”

- Gill

## Emotional impact

The NTS Scams Team asked additional questions in relation to the applicants' feelings towards scam and nuisance calls before and after a unit was installed. There was a noticeable improvement in applicants' emotions as a result of installing a unit for three months. By blocking these calls, applicants were not interacting with criminals, which reduced their anxiety and their worries about losing money to these calls in the future.

529 applicants completed the three-month survey, of those surveyed:

95%

of the applicants who previously felt threatened or scared by scam or nuisance calls no longer felt this way.

100%

of applicants surveyed at three months (who originally felt unsafe in their own home) felt safer due to having a call blocker installed.

99%

of applicants felt happier they no longer receive scam or nuisance calls.

80%

of applicants who were previously worried about losing money to scam and nuisance calls in the future no longer felt this way.

92%

of applicants now say they no longer receive any scam or nuisance calls.

84%

of applicants felt more confident in answering the phone knowing it wouldn't be a scam or nuisance call.

"Feel a lot safer and I don't have to worry about answering the phone whilst I'm cooking in the kitchen." - **Gladys**



## Wellbeing study

As well as the above findings, the NTS Scams Team also wanted to find out if there was a direct link between installing a call blocker and the improvement in the applicants' wellbeing. Anecdotally, the NTS Scams Team had seen improvements of applicants' wellbeing from previous projects, however a formal study had not been completed.

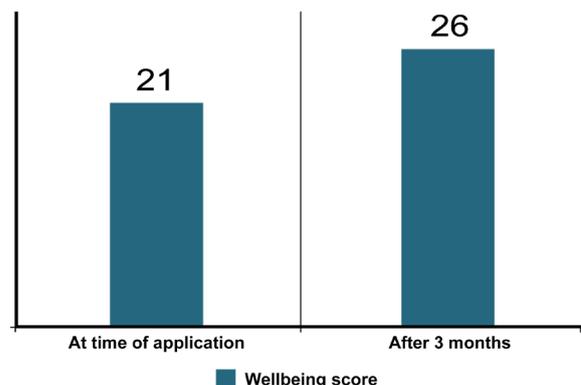
Call blocker applicants were asked if they wanted to take part in an academic and ethically approved wellbeing study overseen by the National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work at Bournemouth University (NCPQSW). 181 applicants volunteered in the study and the seven-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS<sup>12</sup>) was used to survey applicants at two points, once upon application for the unit and then again three months after installation.

At the beginning of the study the applicants had an average wellbeing score of 21.1, considerably lower than the UK population average score of 25.2. After installing a unit for three months applicants reported a significant increase in their overall wellbeing, reporting an average score of 26, in line with the national average.

The lowest levels of wellbeing at all points were observed in applicants under 65 years old, who lived alone or were vulnerable<sup>13</sup>. However, after the installation of a unit, these applicants demonstrated higher increases in their average wellbeing scores when compared to applicants who were not indicated to be vulnerable. This suggests that the call blocker may be of particular benefit to socially isolated or vulnerable people.

Applicants from the study were asked a series of questions on how the unit made them feel. 96%<sup>14</sup> of all applicants reported a positive impact on their wellbeing, the remaining 4% reported little or no impact and no respondents reported a negative impact.

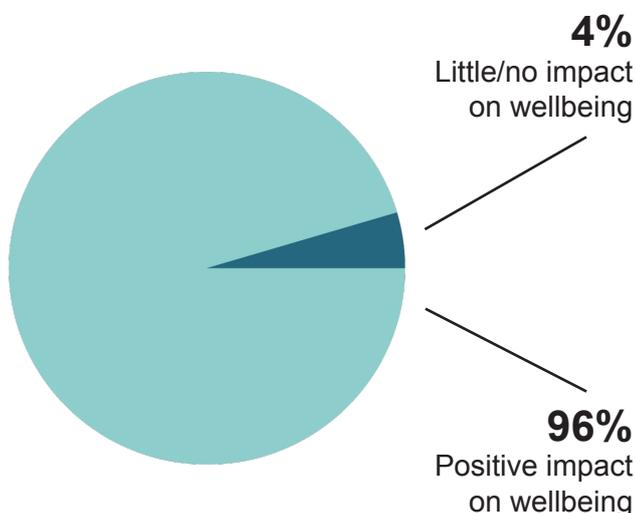
### The average overall wellbeing score



**At the time of application**  
The average vulnerable groups wellbeing score was 20

**After three months**  
The average vulnerable groups wellbeing score was 25

### Did the unit provide any impact to the applicants?



The research supports the case for the installation of a unit where an individual is in receipt of scam or nuisance calls. The findings suggest that there is strong correlation between individual wellbeing and receiving scam and nuisance calls, regardless of whether there is actual engagement or any financial loss. The experience negatively impacts on an individual's sense of usefulness, ability to deal with problems and to feel close to other people. A detailed report of the wellbeing study is available upon request.

<sup>12</sup> <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs>

<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/platform/wemwbs/about/wemwbsvsswemwbs>

<sup>13</sup> Respondents who indicated on the survey that they felt their circumstances made them potentially vulnerable.

<sup>14</sup> 166 out of the 181 applicants answered this question.

## Intelligence

One of the key areas of work for the NTS Scams Team is investigations. The NTS Scams Team works with trueCall to provide real-time data to identify new intelligence from the calls being blocked by the units. The NTS Scams Team uses this data to find criminal entities that can be investigated and disrupted. The most prevalent calls blocked as part of this project were from the fraudulent ‘home cover industry’<sup>15</sup>. These criminals use a variety of techniques to obtain bank details and were regularly charging for non-existent or poor services, such as domestic home repairs and white goods insurance. Many of the criminals identified from the dataset were not known to the NTS Scams Team or previously reported to Action Fraud.

The top three scam call types were:

- White goods insurance – Cover for appliances such as: fridges, freezers and washing machines
- Impersonation callers and spoofed numbers – NHS, BT, Amazon, water companies, fake goods such as CBD (Cannabidiol) oil
- Domestic home repairs – boiler service and drainage work

To date, the NTS Scams Team has identified 147 individual entities who have been making calls to target consumers with these specific types of scams. The telephone numbers associated with breaches of the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) have been shared with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO), the TPS is overseen by the ICO. Sharing the intelligence maximises enforcement opportunities against individuals and organisations who attempt to defraud the public. The intelligence gathered has also been disseminated to national partners, including the NTS Intelligence Team and the Regional Intelligence Analysts. This information would not have been forthcoming without the trueCall data.

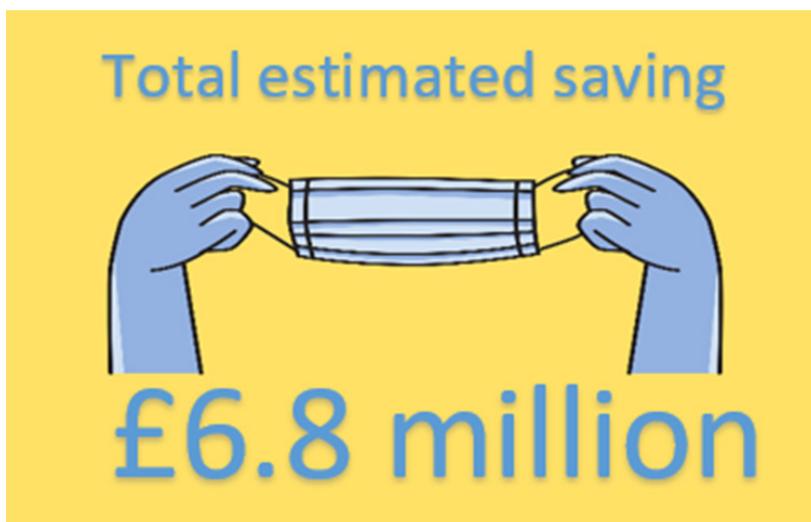


“I feel a lot happier as I know I won’t get any more scam calls - I am disabled so getting up to answer each call was a nuisance.” - **Adam**



The onset of COVID-19 in the UK from March 2020 has provided new opportunities for criminals to take advantage of members of the public. The data provided by trueCall made the NTS Scams Team aware of several new scams that hadn't previously been detected, including criminals impersonating health workers to sell fake face masks for £29.95-49.95. The criminals were estimated to be making 170,000 calls a week. Following this investigation, the telephone number has been terminated. The number was identified to originate from the Philippines and intelligence was passed to The Federal Trade Commission and the Department of Justice. The total savings from this one investigation are an estimated £6,805,098<sup>16</sup>.

This clearly shows the benefits of using the call blocking data as an investigative tool and highlights the value of the units for prevention, detection and disruption of these scam and nuisance calls.



### Case study

Miss T a 34-year-old female living in sheltered supported accommodation, lives with Cerebral Palsy and is wheelchair bound. In summer of 2019 Miss T began to receive calls from companies claiming to offer discounted appliance and electrical goods insurance. Often the conversation stated that the amount debited was a single payment, but this was not the case. Analysis of Miss T's bank account by the NTS Scams Team identified sixteen scam companies of which five were on the trueCall top number list. Miss T had very little paperwork and no evidence of ever receiving any insurance from the companies. One criminal took £195 on three occasions in one day for heating cover which wasn't needed. A trueCall unit was placed in the property and not only did the calls stop but the data provided allowed the NTS Scams Team to identify the companies targeting Miss T. The NTS Scams Team worked in partnership with her local trading standards team and contacted the companies identified from the call data supplied by the unit and have recovered £3,800 for Miss T.



"I don't worry so much about the phone ringing early in the morning or late at night." - Jennifer

<sup>16</sup> 170,000 calls per week for three months with 5% of consumers making a purchase over £39.99 (170,000 x 13 weeks = 2,210,000 calls). 5% equals 110,500 calls at £39.99 each loss. The NTS Scams Team estimate that this would have led to consumers paying money to criminals, with savings in consumer detriment of £4,418,895 based on the average prices charged for on the calls. Plus, an estimated healthcare and health related quality of life savings of £366,203.

## Cost benefit analysis

The NTS Scams Team worked with Optimity<sup>17</sup> to devise a cost benefit analysis (CBA). The CBA is based on how long the unit is likely to be kept installed and in use by the applicant, this is estimated at 4.4<sup>18</sup> years. A full breakdown of the CBA can be found in the Appendix. The below CBA uses conservative figures based on 1,084 units that were installed up until April 2020.

### Financial savings equation

Number of call blockers installed 1,084
x
Number of years a call blocker is in use on average 4.4
x
Average annual loss before installation of call blocker £3,027.74 <sup>19</sup>
x
Percentage of scam calls blocked by the unit 91%

### Healthcare and health related Quality of Life saving equation<sup>20</sup>:

Financial savings
x
Physical and emotional harm
x
Health service costs

**Total estimated saving = £20,227,167.42**

**The cost of the Call Blocker Project 2019-2020 was £640,000.  
Therefore, for every £1 spent, the project has saved consumers and society  
£32.**

**The cost benefit ratio 32:1**

<sup>17</sup> <https://optimityadvisors.com/homepage>

<sup>18</sup> This calculation is from trueCall.

<sup>19</sup> Calculation based on completed installation surveys.

<sup>20</sup> This calculation is based on figures from the Home Office Costs of Crime Survey. It calculates the physical and emotional harm and the cost to health services per £1 of financial loss.

## Wellbeing cost benefit analysis

A financial figure for improving a person’s wellbeing due to installing a call blocker can also be applied to the wellbeing study.

- At application, a person’s wellbeing was 21.1
- After three months of using a unit, the person’s wellbeing increased to 26
- Recording a 4.9 increase in average wellbeing

Applying the wellbeing valuation method<sup>21</sup>

**A** 21.1 equates to £21,049

**B** 26 equates to £24,225

The calculation is:

(B) £24,225
-
(A) £21,049
=
£3,176
-
27% (£857.52 for deadweight <sup>22</sup> )
=
£2,318.48 wellbeing saving per person
x
1,084 units
=
£2,513,232.32
-
cost of delivery £640,000
=
£1,873,232.32 Net financial value to all applicant’s wellbeing

<sup>21</sup> Page 5. Trotter, L., Rallings Adams, M-K. 2017. Valuing improvements in mental health: Applying the wellbeing valuation method to WEMWBS. HACT. London, UK.

<sup>22</sup> Deadweight is calculated in the equation to account for changes that would have happened anyway regardless of any specific intervention.

## Case studies

The below case studies and anecdotal quotes have been obtained as part of the call blocker project.

“I can’t believe it, we’ve had no scam calls since it was installed.” - **Carol**



“Unfortunately, I have been ill for considerable time with cancer and after effects of radiotherapy. Today I am back at home and my son-in-law has connected the blocker for me it will be a great relief. Three demands for cash last week and frightening threats over the phone. I can rest now to know that only friends and people I know will get in touch. Very many thanks.”

- **A letter received from a member of the public.**

“We were amazed to find that since installation on the 25th November, 65 calls had been blocked, quite a few recently from Hull, where we have no contacts. There were also a number of blocked international calls, so that was good.

I suppose at some unconscious level it has had a positive effect on our wellbeing, because we’ve just not been aware of any of those 65 calls! So yes, it has been very good for us, as over four months on we now recognize just how valuable it’s been. We send you our good wishes for all the work you do, and may you continue to keep well and safe.”

- **A call blocker user from the Isle of Wight.**

Mr A was a known scam victim, who the trading standards officer had dealt with previously and on this occasion they had applied for a call blocker.

Mr A is 92 years old, lives on his own and has issues with his legs, he receives lots of unwanted mail as well as calls — mostly around lotions and potions to help his legs, and white goods insurance. Since receiving the unit, the manager of the sheltered housing where he lives said that he seems much brighter in himself.

The manager said “He now gets far fewer calls and worries less about whether he’s being scammed or not. Since it’s been in place, he feels much better, more confident and positive.”

Mr A said “People who call are friendly and befriend me and all of a sudden I’m getting my card out on the phone. I’m not worrying about that anymore, as I’m not getting those calls now.”

- **A case study from an application made by a Trading Standards Officer from Kingston and Sutton.**

## Comments collected from the three-month surveys



“It’s absolutely great, I wish I had got the unit earlier. I feel much better and safer now.” - **Jane**



“My husband has dementia so the unit gives me the sense of security.” - **Ethel**



“I am really pleased with the unit as was getting lots of scam calls before - it has definitely improved my wellbeing now.” - **Peter**



“Fantastic impact. Taken away the stress. I’m on my own for most of the time. When you’re on own it’s a nightmare, so it’s made a big difference to me. I’m a happier person. It gives me a feeling of being in control of each day - I used to frequently think it’s hardly worth doing something because the phone might ring.” - **Amir**



“I have already recommended the unit to others as I think it’s the best thing we’ve ever had!” - **Reena**

## Conclusion

The evidence from this project has shown call blockers are an effective way to prevent scam and nuisance calls and help protect members of the public who receive scam calls. Most importantly, it is evident that installing a unit is an effective way to improve wellbeing and build consumer confidence.

It's clear that using a call blocker can provide an extra layer of protection for consumers and prevent criminals from taking advantage of people who are vulnerable due to their circumstances. The data provided by the project has also proved invaluable as an investigative and intelligence tool, which has led to the closure of a prolific telephone number with many more numbers being investigated. This type of crime is highly lucrative for criminals and they are continually diversifying. However, installing a unit blocks 99% of these unwanted calls and reduces this type of crime.

The wellbeing study has proven that scam and nuisance calls have a significant impact on people's wellbeing. This also includes people who don't even engage with the scam itself, but merely receive the incessant calls. The evidence shows that the applicants from this study had a lower than average wellbeing score compared with the general population. However, after just three months of using a call blocker, applicants' wellbeing increased significantly and is equivalent to a saving of £1,873,232.32. The NTS Scams Team support the below recommendations that have been identified by the wellbeing report <sup>23</sup>.

1

**There should be greater recognition of the impact that scam and nuisance calls have on wellbeing, regardless of whether there is actual engagement or any financial loss.** The findings of this research revealed the significant negative impact that simply receiving these types of calls has on individual wellbeing. This suggests that the scale of people experiencing a negative impact due to scam and nuisance calls is likely to be far larger than the occurrences reported to Action Fraud.

2

**All regular landline users are likely to benefit from call blocker technology.** Significant increases in wellbeing were observed across all ages, genders, and levels of vulnerability. Although a lot of work is being done to intercept calls at the source, the adaptive behaviour of these criminals leads the best point of intervention to be at the point of contact.

3

**Call blockers should be made available to vulnerable individuals to support them to live independently.** Supporting the aims of the Care Act 2014, this research demonstrated how a call blocker can be a vital part of a toolkit to support independent living and to safeguard vulnerable individuals from financial abuse.

4

**Older people, those who self-identify as vulnerable, and individuals who live alone are most likely to benefit from the installation of a call blocker.** These research findings suggest that increased focus should be placed on these groups, as they are most negatively impacted by experiencing scam and nuisance calls and benefitted the most from the installation of a call blocker.

5

**Building on the previous work of the NTS Scams Team, further signposting would help provide clear guidance regarding the application for, and the potential benefits of, installing a call blocker.** The call blocker utilised within this research led to the substantial and sustained reduction in unwanted calls; however, more research would be required to explore the impacts of different levels of call reduction and the efficacy of alternative call blockers.

# Appendix

## Cost benefit analysis

Financial savings equation:

The average annual loss is worked out using data from the application and installation surveys as follows:

During the application process, 228 individuals reported a financial loss to scams. During install, 76 reported exact losses over a six-month period. An average loss per person was calculated (£7,197.52) and this was multiplied by 228 to arrive at the total loss across all individuals who reported a loss in the preceding six-month period (£1,641,035.40). This total loss was divided by the total number of individuals who received a call blocker (1,084) to get an average loss (£1,513.87) and multiplied by two to calculate the average annual loss per person with a call blocker installed (£3,027.74).

The average number of years for which the call blockers are active is reported by trueCall based on data received from all installed units.

The percentage of scam calls blocked by the units is based on data from trueCall. This is based on national analysis which shows that trueCall units block 91%<sup>24</sup> of scam calls.

Healthcare and health related Quality of Life savings equation:

This calculation is based on figures from the Home Office Costs of Crime Survey 2018<sup>25</sup>. It calculates the physical and emotional harm and the cost to health services per £1 of financial loss.

For every £500 of stolen property/financial losses, the survey shows £200 loss linked to physical and emotional harm caused.

For every £500 financial loss, the survey shows £70 of cost to health services.

Therefore, for every £1 financial loss, the physical and emotional harm and health service costs are 54p.

“Huge relief to me as I used to get a lot of calls. Great unit as I’m on my own and 77, but this has made me feel safe.” - **Mary**



“It’s brilliant as my husband doesn’t answer scam calls anymore and he used to reply to scammers and we lost money to scams. It has all stopped now.” - **Sam**

<sup>24</sup> trueCall call blockers have been shown to block 95%+ of nuisance calls. However, we know that scam calls are more difficult to block. A variety of independent external sets of scam numbers were checked against the trueCall database to determine trueCall's effectiveness against scam calls. trueCall uses the lowest figure of 91% as the estimate in working out a cost benefit.

<sup>25</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/632110/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-crime-horr99.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/632110/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-crime-horr99.pdf)

# NATIONAL TRADING STANDARDS

## Scams Team

The National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team is funded by National Trading Standards and is hosted by Surrey County Council. The NTS Scams Team was founded in 2012 to tackle the problem of postal, telephone and doorstep scams. The NTS Scams Team works across England and Wales with trading standards and partner agencies to investigate scams and identify and support those who fall victim to them.

Postal, telephone and doorstep scams are often targeted specifically at disadvantaged consumers or those in periods of vulnerability. The NTS Scams Team estimates that the detriment to UK consumers as a result of these scams is between £5-10 billion a year.



**Friends Against Scams** is a NTS Scams Team initiative, which aims to protect and prevent people from becoming victims of scams by empowering people to “Take a Stand Against Scams”.

**Friends Against Scams** has been created to tackle the lack of scams awareness by providing information about scams and those who fall victim to them. This information enables communities and organisations to understand scams, talk about scams and cascade messages throughout communities about scams prevention and protection.

**Friends Against Scams** encourages communities and organisations to take the knowledge learnt and turn it into action.

Anybody can join **Friends Against Scams** and make a difference in their own way.  
To find out more about how you can be involved with **Friends Against Scams** please visit

**[www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk](http://www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk)**

# Exploring the Impact of Call Blockers on User Well-Being

Supporting victims of  
financial fraud

Emily Rosenorn-Lanng  
& Stevie Corbin-Clarke  
July 2020

This project was  
commissioned  
and supported  
by:

**NATIONAL  
TRADING  
STANDARDS**

Scams Team

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**Acknowledgements:** This work was undertaken in partnership between The National Centre of Post-Qualifying Social Work at Bournemouth University and the National Trading Standards Scams Team. The research team would like to thank the National Trading Standards Scams Team for all their hard and rigorous work to collect the data and the participants who kindly gave their time to participate in the research.

# Executive Summary

## The problem

The National Crime Agency's (NCA) National Strategic Assessment 2020 found that fraud was the most common crime in England and Wales. Telephone scams or 'Vishing' (voice phishing) are a specific category of financial fraud where the criminals make contact by telephone or text. In the year ending December 2018, Action Fraud reported a 73% increase in reported consumer phone fraud.

Research has highlighted the negative impact of scam engagement on health and well-being, with the discovery that scams undermine self-confidence, as well as confidence in others.

## The intervention

The National Trading Standards (NTS) Scams Team Call Blocker Project 2019 was targeted at households who receive scam and nuisance phone calls and/or are susceptible to scams due to their circumstances. The units supplied, trueCall Secure plus units, provide enhanced levels of filtering choices. **Over 2,000 call blockers were applied for within eight days.**

The NTS Scams Team works in partnership with trueCall, who specialise in call blocker technology and who reported that 99% of scam and nuisance calls had been blocked in the initial sample of units supplied.

## How we evaluated the impact

A short 7-item well-being assessment scale was included in the online application process to collect baseline data prior to the installation of the call blocker. The same tool was then applied three months after installation via a telephone questionnaire, allowing comparison with the baseline data collected at installation.

## Key findings

### Before installation of a call blocker

- 94% of applicants reported receiving scam or nuisance phone calls in the previous six months.
- 93% of self-identified vulnerable respondents were worried about losing money in future.
- Applicants of the call-blocker project had a significantly **lower well-being score on average than the UK population.**
- 63% of respondents who lived alone or were vulnerable fell within the **low well-being classification.**

### Three months after installation of a call blocker

- 92% of respondents reported **not receiving any scams or nuisance calls** and those who did received significantly less.
- Just 17% of all respondents were worried about losing money in the future.
- Average well-being scores had **significantly increased** bringing the sample in line with the general population.
- Less than 19% of vulnerable respondents and just 11% of those living alone remained on a low well-being score after three months.

## Conclusion

The findings support the case for the installation of a call blocker where an individual is in receipt of scam calls. Although a causal relationship cannot be inferred, the findings suggest that there is strong interaction between individual well-being and receiving scam and nuisance calls, with the experience negatively impacting on an individual sense of usefulness, ability to deal with problems and to feel close to other people.

## Recommendations

- 1. There should be greater recognition of the impact that scam and nuisance calls have on well-being, regardless of whether there is actual engagement or any financial loss.** The findings of this research revealed the significant negative impact that simply receiving these types of calls has on individual well-being. This suggests that the scale of people experiencing a negative impact due to scam and nuisance calls is likely to be far larger than the occurrences reported to Action Fraud.
- 2. All regular landline users are likely to benefit from call blocker technology.** Significant increases in well-being were observed across all ages, genders, and levels of vulnerability. Although a lot of work is being done to intercept calls at the source, the adaptive behaviour of these criminals leads the best point of intervention to be at the point of contact.
- 3. Call blockers should be made available to vulnerable individuals to support them to live independently.** Supporting the aims of the Care Act 2014, this research demonstrated how a call blocker can be a vital part of a toolkit to support independent living and to safeguard vulnerable individuals from financial abuse.
- 4. Older people, those who self-identify as vulnerable, and individuals who live alone are most likely to benefit from the installation of a call blocker.** These research findings suggest that increased focus should be placed on these groups, as they are most negatively impacted by experiencing scam and nuisance calls and benefitted the most from the installation of a call blocker.
- 5. Building on the previous work of The NTS Scams Team, further signposting would help provide clear guidance regarding the application for and the potential benefits of installing a call blocker.** The call blocker utilized within this research led to the substantial and sustained reduction in unwanted calls; however, more research would be required to explore the impacts of different levels of call reduction and the efficacy of alternative call blockers.

# Introduction

Financial Scams and Fraud is a criminal offence which involves a perpetrator deliberately deceiving another person to gain an advantage, often financial, to exploit their target. Scams come in varying forms across varying mediums, but all involve deliberate deception, intending to mislead or trick their intended target for financial gain, often by appealing to visceral needs and desires. This report uses the term 'financial scam' to denote financial abuse perpetrated by those unknown to the victim linked to *'unscrupulous traders or criminals who employ marketing techniques to sell non-existent, valueless or poor quality goods, or engage consumers in bogus schemes such as investment fraud'* (Lee and Baxter, 2017, p. 24).

Recent estimates suggest that *£3.89 trillion is lost to fraud globally* every year, with the UK losing up to an estimated £190 billion across all sectors (Gee and Button, 2019). The 2017 Annual Fraud Indicator estimated a similar annual loss, suggesting that *£7 billion of this was lost by individuals* directly.

The NCA National Strategic Assessment 2020 found that fraud was the most common crime in England and Wales, representing a third of all estimated crime. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) estimates that there were *3.7 million incidents of fraud in the year ending December 2019*. Although only marginally higher than the previous year, all three fraud reporting bodies: Action Fraud, Cifas, and UK Finance, reported increases in the number of offences.

In the year ending December 2018, Action Fraud reported a 12% overall increase in the incidents of fraud reported to them, seeing a 73% increase in reported consumer phone fraud. This increase may partly be due to an increase in the activity of criminals, but it could also be because of increased reporting.

Underreporting has been a recurring issue when trying to understand the true size and scale of financial scams. Individuals may be reluctant to report involvement for many reasons, which include being unaware that they are victims of fraud, feeling partly responsible or holding themselves to blame, embarrassment, confusion, low financial loss and the ambiguity of the fraud (Gee and Button, 2019). In addition, scams are even less frequently reported by older people (James, Boyle, and Bennett, 2014), therefore it is likely that the true detriment of financial fraud and scams could be much higher.

The increase in the reported number of incidents may in part be testament to the work undertaken by NTS Scams Team to raise the profile of financial scams, support targets to recognize the signs of a scam and to appropriately report them.



## Telephone Scams

Telephone Scams and Vishing are a specific category of financial fraud where the criminals make contact by telephone or text, frequently from a misleading, deceptive, or 'spoofed' phone number via an internet telephone service. This type of scam can be stand alone, using a combination of psychological tactics in an attempt to obtain information from the victim, such as personal and financial details, account numbers and passwords.

However, engagement from the victim often leads to inclusion on a 'suckers list' and further targeting. Telephone scams can also be a development of other types of fraud such as phishing, in which verbal contact is used to persuade the victim to do things they believe are in their best interests, such as allow someone access to a computer to 'fix' a problem.

### Common types of telephone scams:

- ❖ Computer software service fraud
- ❖ TV subscription scams
- ❖ Impersonation – e.g. Bank/Police
- ❖ Courier fraud
- ❖ Compensation
- ❖ HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)
- ❖ Automated voicemails
- ❖ Drainage insurance
- ❖ Warranty scams
- ❖ White good insurance scams
- ❖ Pension and investment scams

*The UK accounted for 15% of the total number of fraudulent calls blocked across the world in 2018, accounting for a total of 25 million calls (BIC, 2019).*

In addition, there are unwanted nuisance calls, which are made by legitimate companies but can be harmful and distressing for many. Nuisance calls include marketing calls (live and recorded), silent calls, and abandoned calls (ICO, 2020). In January 2020, *48% of phone users, both mobile and landline, reported receiving nuisance calls.*

## National Trading Standards Scams Team

The NTS Scams Team is funded by National Trading Standards and is hosted by Surrey County Council. Founded in 2012, the team focuses on postal, telephone and doorstep scams, working with trading standards and partner agencies across England and Wales to investigate scams and identify and support those who may have become victims.

## The National Centre for Post-Qualifying Social Work at Bournemouth University.

NCPQSW has worked closely with the NTS Scams Team on a range of research exploring the scale and impact of financial scams. These collaborations have led to the publication of a range of texts and guidance to support individuals and Health and Social Care practitioners to identify the signs of a scam and individuals who may be engaging with or a being targeted by criminals.



## What is well-being?

Whilst there is no widely accepted definition of well-being, the Care Act 2014 sets out what is understood as the contributing elements to an individual's well-being. Subjectively, well-being can be interpreted as a combined measure of life satisfaction, feelings of happiness, sadness, anger, stress and pain and a sense of purpose or meaning in life.

### **“Well-being”, in relation to an individual, regards an individual's well-being so far as relating to any of the following—**

- (a) personal dignity (including treatment of the individual with respect);
- (b) physical and mental health and emotional well-being;
- (c) protection from abuse and neglect;
- (d) control by the individual over day-to-day life;
- (e) participation in work, education, training or recreation;
- (f) social and economic well-being;
- (g) domestic, family, and personal relationships;
- (h) suitability of living accommodation;
- (i) the individual's contribution to society.

The Care Act, 2014.

Well-being is a concept that relates solely to the individual, as what would be conducive to one person's overall well-being may not be to another. The flexibility of the term is designed to reflect this individual variance; however there are some shared experiences that will affect well-being including chronic health conditions and economic status. Well-being also varies consistently by age, dipping between 45-55 years and rising in older people.

'Certain types of high harm frauds, such as romance, courier and computer software service fraud, often target those who may be more vulnerable to becoming victims, by virtue of age, technological knowledge or emotional state.'

The NCA National Strategic Assessment, 2020, pp. 50

Although there have been some slight variances in the feelings of happiness, worthwhileness, and anxiety of the UK population since 2011, life satisfaction has remained static between 2016 and 2019.

The relationship between health and well-being is generally thought to be two-directional, with physical health impacting on well-being and vice-versa (Steptoe et al., 2014).

Research has highlighted the negative impact of scam engagement on health and well-being, with the discovery of a scam undermining self-confidence, as well as confidence in others (Fenge and Lee, 2018). The NCA National Strategic Assessment highlights the possible impact of high harm frauds, of which scam calls can be a bridge towards; however, the impact of scam or nuisance calls themselves on well-being should not be underestimated. Potential impacts, and consequences thereof, can be just as detrimental to an individual's sense of well-being as defined above.

Therefore, we need not only consider the impact the installation of a call blocker may have on the individual but also what impact being in receipt of scam and nuisance calls may have on the individual.

# The intervention

The NTS Scams Team call blocker project, which began in October 2019, saw over 2,000 call blockers applied for within eight days. This success enabled the team to secure further funding to extend the project. The NTS Scams Team works in partnership with trueCall, who specialise in call blocker technology and reported that 99% of scam and nuisance calls had been blocked in the initial sample of units supplied.

The Call Blocker Project was aimed particularly at people who may already be receiving scam and nuisance phone calls and/or are susceptible to scams due to their circumstances. The units supplied were trueCall Secure plus units, which provide enhanced levels of filtering choices.

## *trueCall Secure plus*

trueCall Secure plus is a call blocker that is specifically designed for older customers. It offers three levels of restrictions on incoming calls, which are designed to encourage telemarketers to disengage and to block international callers (unless they know the code) to the Trusted Caller Only Profile, which only allows designated trusted callers to connect. trueCall Secure plus allows outgoing numbers to be barred should it be required by the user or household.

Applications for partners/organisations opened to the general public October 2019 .

Successful candidates were selected based on an underlying decision tree; if applicants felt that their circumstances make them vulnerable and/or have



received scam or nuisance calls in the last six months, they were asked to complete an optional well-being survey prior to entering their contact details.

Application: Applicants must consent and successfully complete the online application via the Friends Against Scams website.



Installation: Successful applicants could chose to self-install the unit or book an engineer to install the unit for them.



Follow-up: Consenting applicants were contacted by telephone three months after installation.

# Methodology

## Aim

The aim of this piece of research was to assess the impact of the active use of call-blocker technology on the well-being of users.

## Method

A short 7-item well-being assessment scale was included in the application process to collect baseline data prior to the installation of the call blocker. The same tool was applied three months after installation and compared with baseline data. Qualitative responses were also collected to provide greater context.

## The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS)

The SWEMWBS is a shorter 7-item version of the Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). It comprises of a series of 7 statements to which respondents select the point on a 5-point Likert scale which best describes their experience over the last two weeks.

Underpinning the scale is a definition of mental well-being covering two perspectives:

- 1. the subjective experience of happiness and life satisfaction.*
- 2. positive psychological functioning, good relationships with others and self-realisation.*

The scale is widely used on both a national and local level to monitor mental well-being of populations and is deemed suitable for measuring change as a result

of specific interventions. Permissions were sought to use the tool by NCPQSW at Bournemouth University.

## Data Collection

The SWEMWBS was embedded in a larger question set devised and administered by the NTS Scams Team. They were the data controllers and the team received training to ensure standardization throughout the data collection process.

Data was collected over a rolling time frame, allowing a three-month period between the installation of the unit and data collection. Respondents were not obligated to participate at the follow-up stage.

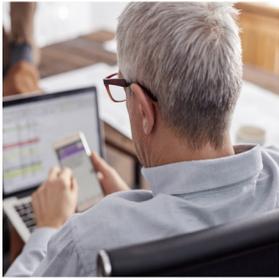
## Data Analysis

The data was collected and cleaned by the NTS Scams Team. All identifiable data points were removed prior to delivery to the research team to ensure respondent confidentiality.

Data has been analysed and interpreted as detailed in the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) User Guide for Researchers (2016).

## Sample

770 respondents consented to complete the SWEMWBS at the application stage. Subsequently, 181 respondents completed the 7-item well-being questionnaire at two unique points.



Application for call blocker

Online



Three months after application

Telephone

Therefore, the analysis of the well-being sample will be comprised of the 181 respondents who completed the scale at both points.

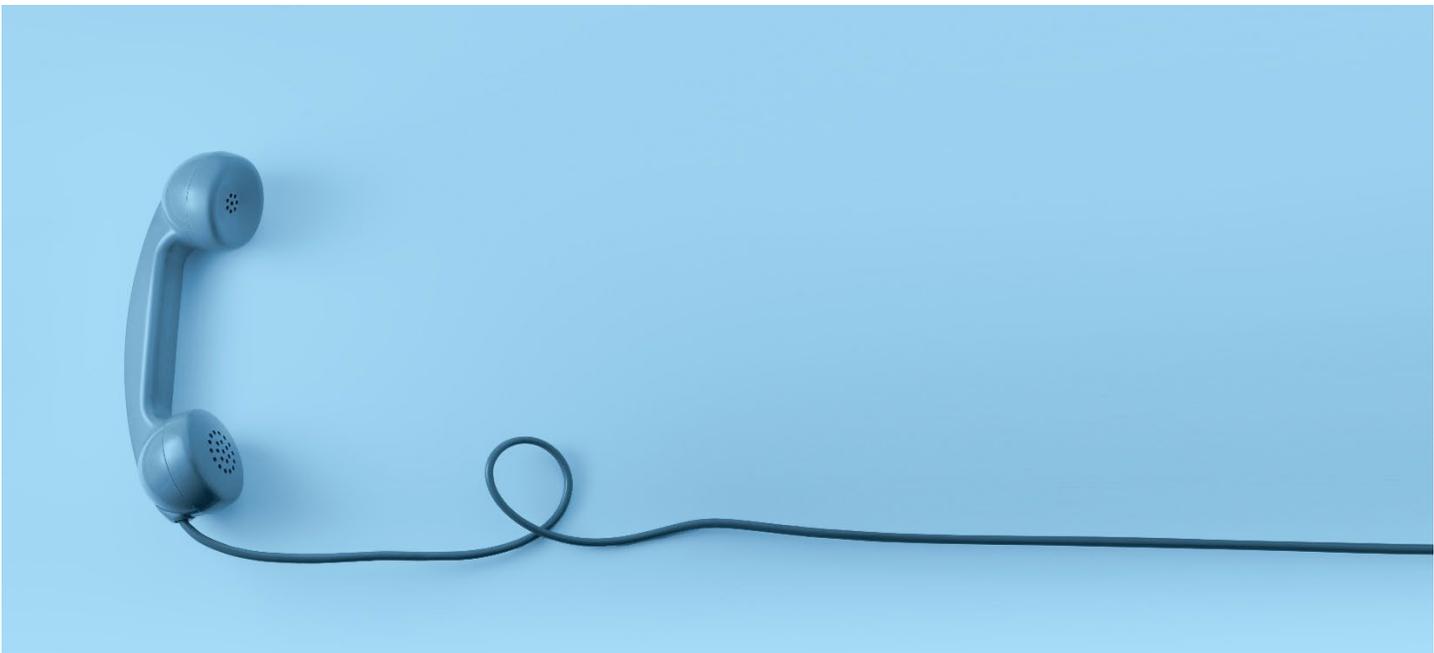
The WEMWBS User Guide for Researchers (2016) states that for practical purposes a sample size of above 100 is required to ensure that changes can be appropriately assessed as statistically significant. Where group sizes drop below this threshold, findings should be interpreted with caution.

### Strengths and limitations

It is not possible to infer cause and effect as many other factors may impact on an individual's well-being. The scale does, however, provide an effective indicator to assess the impact of active use of call blockers over a population. This relationship is further explored using open non-directive questions.

### COVID-19

COVID-19 has impacted on the research, drawing the data collection period to a close earlier than initially planned. This decision was made for a wide range of logistical reasons; however in the context of this research it would be anticipated that COVID-19 has had the primary impact on respondents' well-being and it would therefore not be possible to obtain any accurate understanding of the impact of the call blocker. It is worth noting, however, that the timely installation of a call blocker may have protected many of the sample from COVID-19 related scams during this period.



# Results

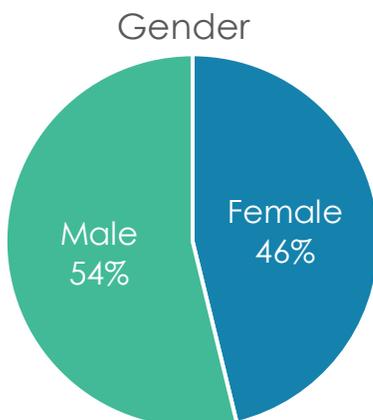
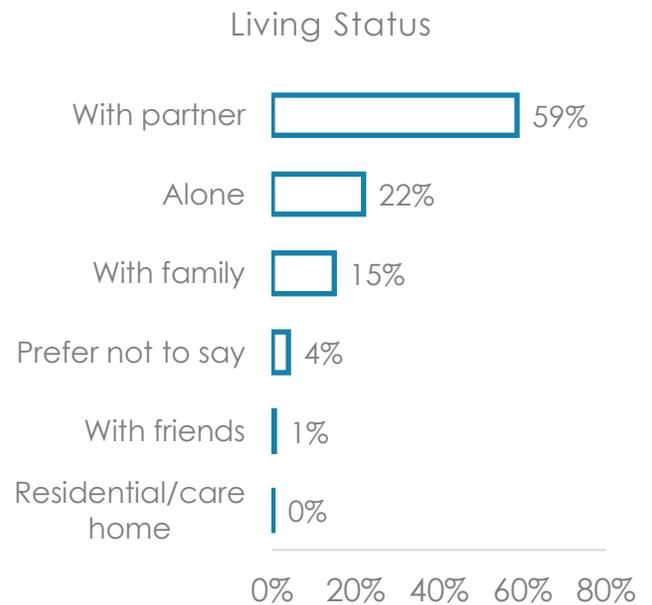
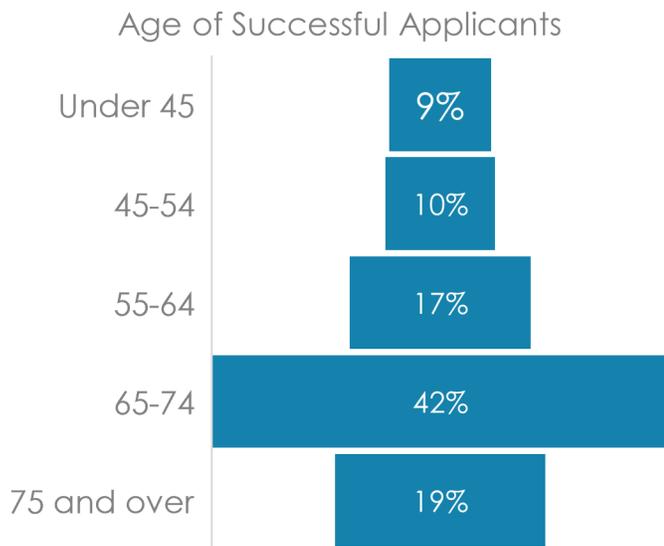
Two populations will be considered:

**Parent population:** All respondents who consented to participate at the application stage. (n=770)

**Well-being sample:** respondents who completed the SWEMWBS at both installation and three months after installation. (n=181)

The analysis only includes participants who consented to participate and may therefore demonstrate some variance to data held by the NTS Scams Team.

## Who applied for a Call Blocker?



When applicants were asked whether they believe their circumstances made them vulnerable (e.g. bereavement, cognitive decline), 51% said they did not and 49% said they did.

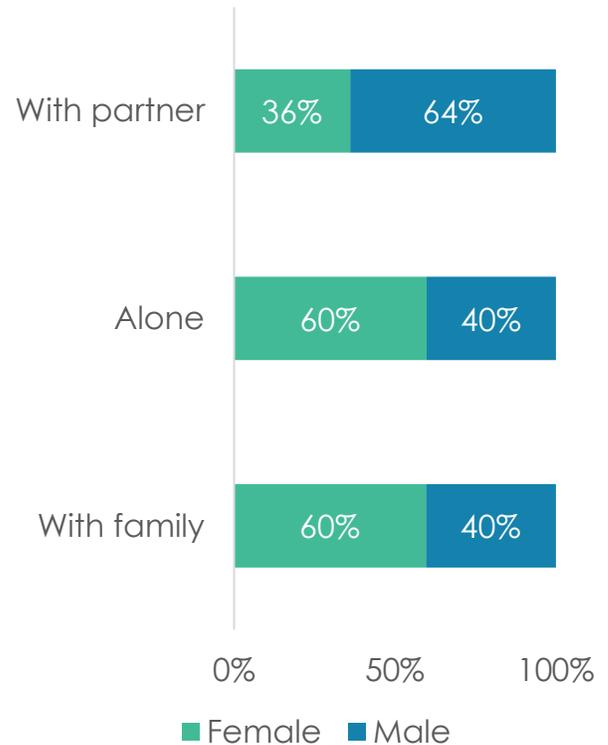
## Successful applicant demographics

Most successful applicants were aged over 60 years old (73%), with the youngest applicant being 21 years of age and the eldest being 94 at the time of application. The average age across all groups was 65 years old.

Successful applicants most frequently lived with a partner (59%), alone (22%) or with family (1%).

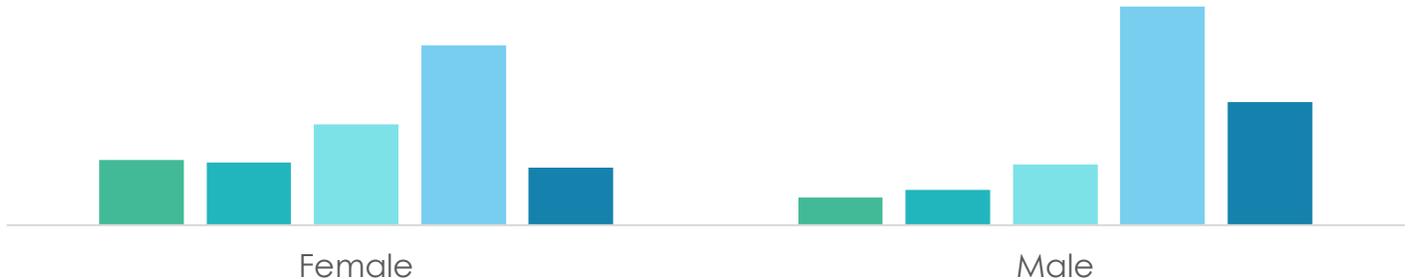
Just over half of successful applicants were male (54%) and a higher proportion of male applicants reported living with a partner compared to living alone or with family, where the majority of applicants were female. Female applicants were younger on average (61 years), compared to male applicants (68 years).

Living Status by Gender



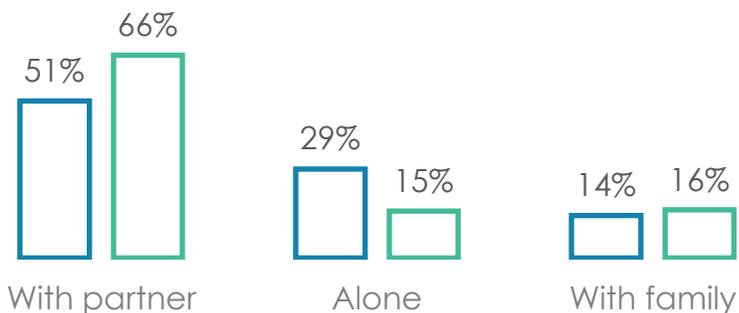
Successful applicants by age and gender

■ Under 45 ■ 45-54 ■ 55-64 ■ 65-74 ■ 75 and over



Living Status by Vulnerability Status

■ Self identified as vulnerable ■ Not vulnerable

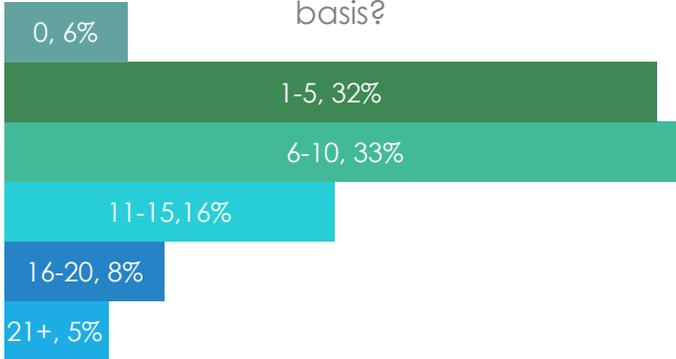


Respondents who indicated that they felt their circumstances made them potentially vulnerable were more likely to live alone, rather than with a partner or family. However, they demonstrated similar age and gender profiles as applicants who did not self-identify as potentially more vulnerable.

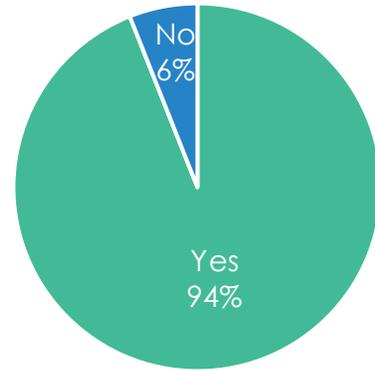
## Experience of Scam or Nuisance Calls

94% of applicants reported receiving scam or nuisance phone calls in the last six months, with a third reporting receiving between 6-10 on a weekly basis.

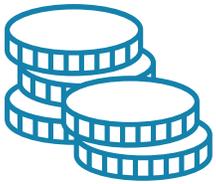
Roughly how many scam or nuisance calls do you receive on a weekly basis?



Have you received any scam or nuisance phone calls in the last six months?



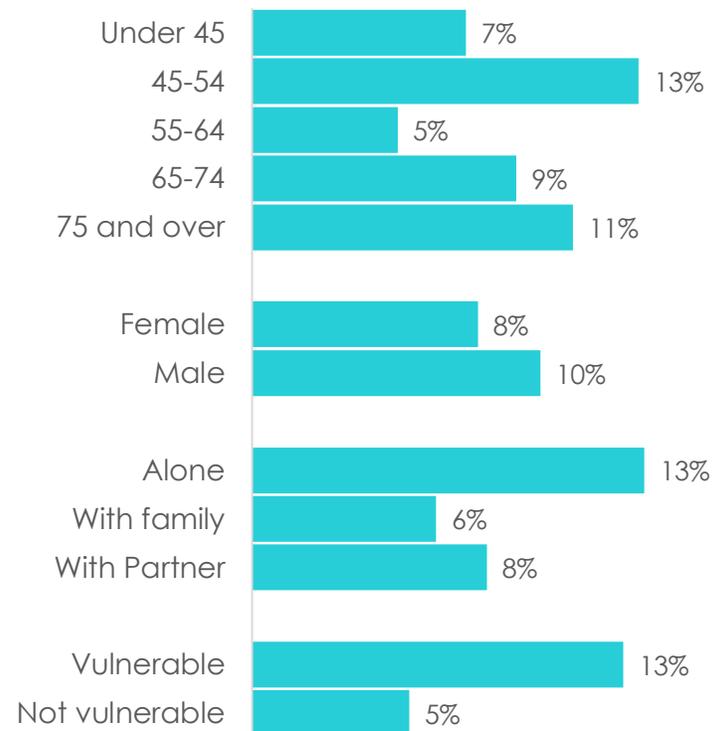
Levels of nuisance or scams calls did not vary significantly by age, gender, living arrangements or vulnerability status. However, as this was a prerequisite for a successful application this may not be representative of the wider population. Similarly, the volume of calls received remained consistent over the sample.



**9% of successful applicants (n=65) reported losing money to scam or nuisance calls prior to applying for the call blocker.**

Respondents were more likely to report losing money if they lived alone or indicated that they were vulnerable. 13% of respondents aged between 45-54 reported a loss as did 11% of respondents over the age of 75.

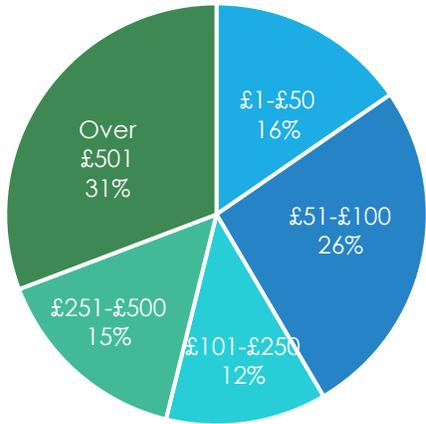
Have you lost any money to scam or nuisance calls? - Yes



**93% of vulnerable respondents were worried about losing money in the future.**

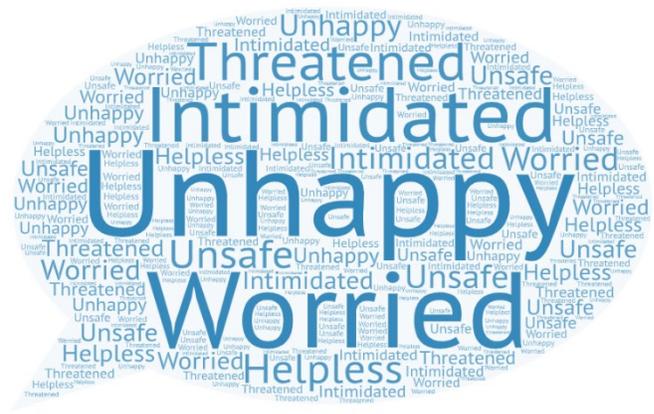
**93%**

How much money have you lost to scam or nuisance calls?



Just under half of respondents reported that scam and nuisance calls made them feel unhappy (48%), 44% reported feeling worried or anxious and over a third reported feeling intimidated (38%).

31% of respondents who had lost money to scam and/or nuisance calls lost over £501 and a quarter of respondents reported losing between £51-£100. Furthermore, 81% of all respondents were worried about losing money in the future, increasing to 93% of respondents who felt they were vulnerable.

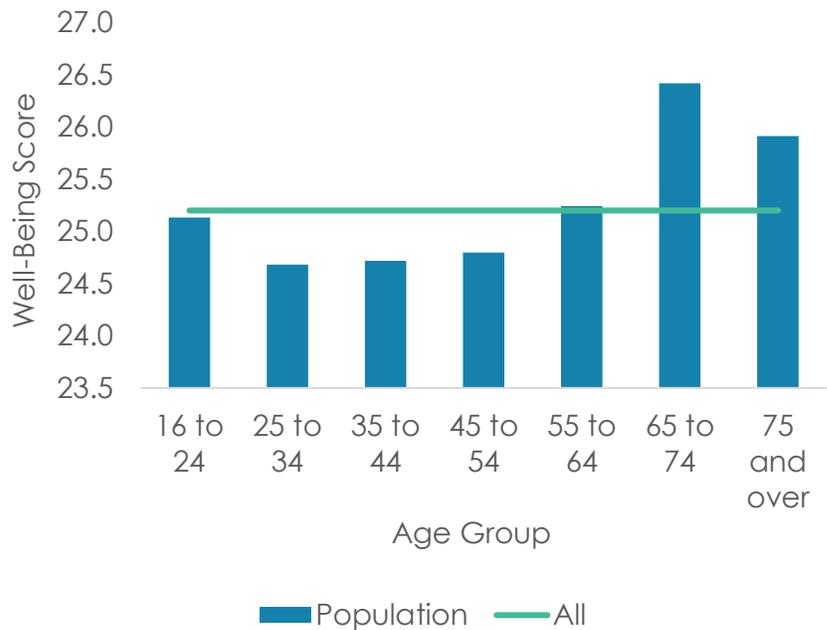


## Successful applicant well-being and population norms

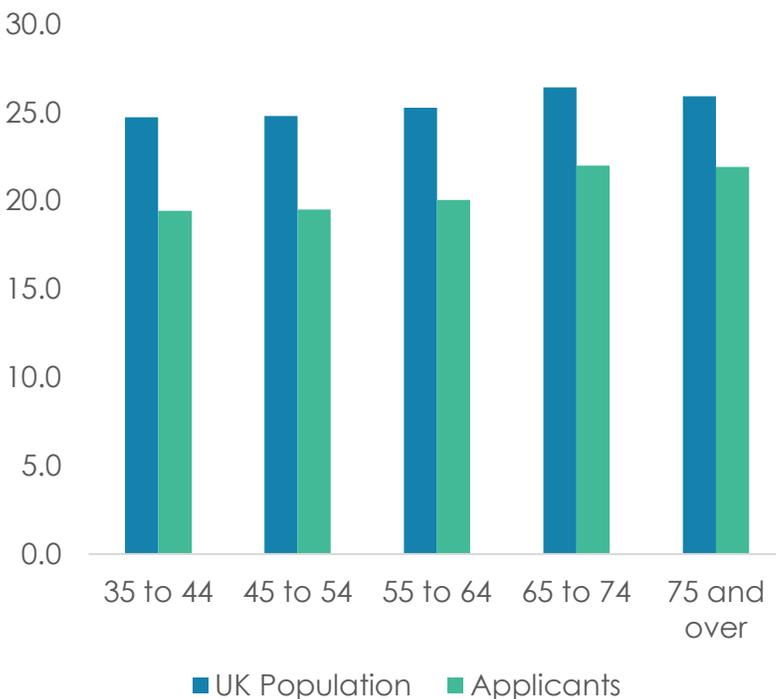
The Office of National Statistics (ONS) assessment suggests there is no overall long-term change in the well-being of the population as assessed by the SWEMWBS since 2008, although some short-term variance has occurred ( $\pm 0.9$ ).

The average level of well-being for the UK population in 2016 was 25.2; levels of self-reported well-being vary most notably by age, with the highest levels being observed in those aged over 65. Population well-being appears consistent across both genders: 25.4 on average for men and 25 for women.

UK Population well-being by age



Well-being - UK Population and applicant comparisons

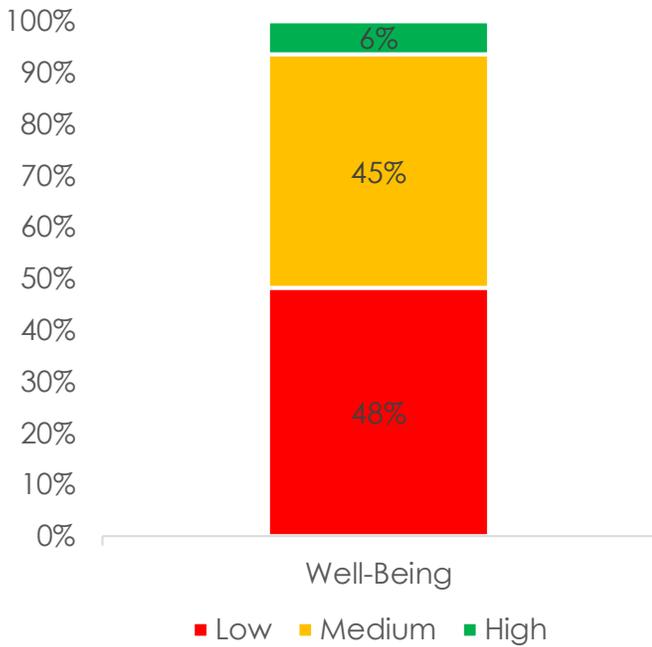


**The applicants to the call blocker project had an average well-being of 21.1, considerably lower than the UK population average of 25.2.** This remained consistent across all age groups, although individual age groups followed the trend observed in the population as a whole.

The highest level of recorded well-being was observed in respondents who lived with a partner (21.9), and the lowest in those who reported living alone (19.9).

Respondents who regarded themselves as vulnerable reported an average level of well-being of 19.9, which is significantly lower than respondents who do not regard themselves as vulnerable.

## Well-being Classification

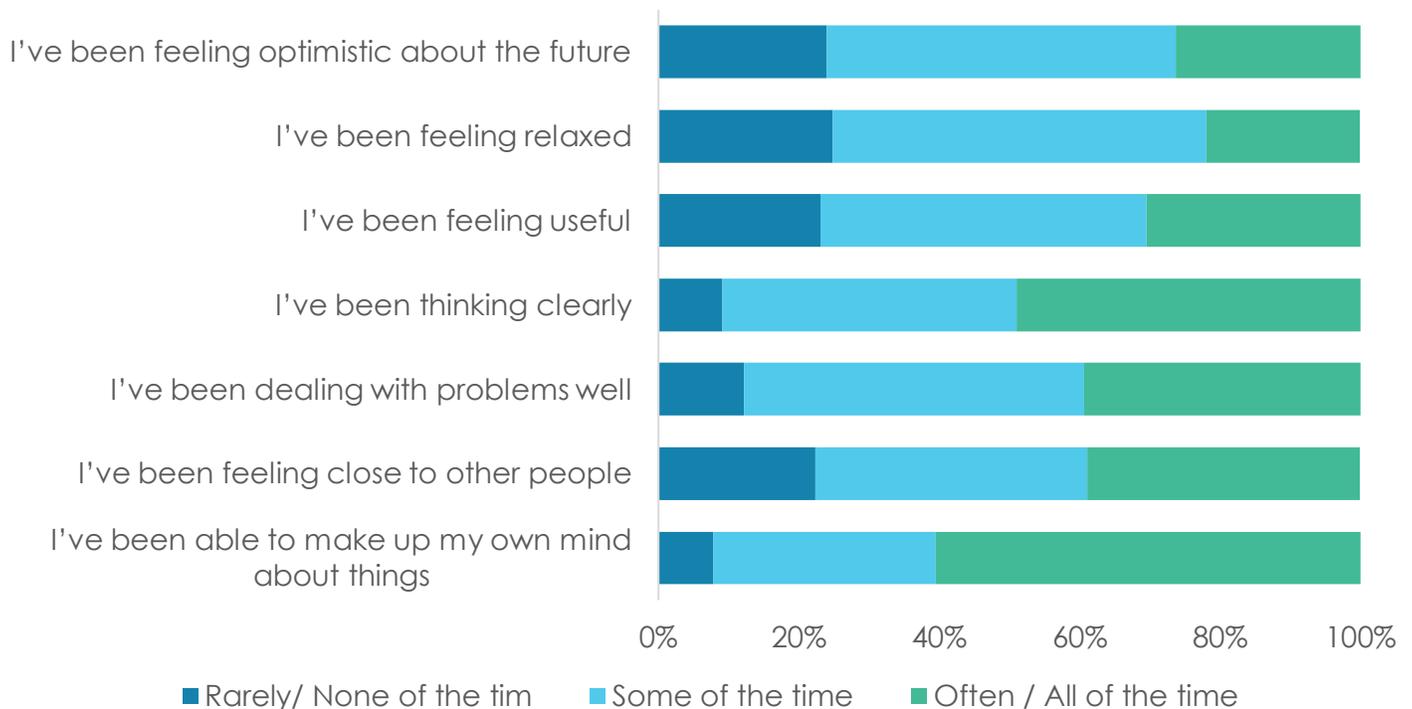


The SWEMWBS provides us with three levels of classification of well-being: low, medium, and high. 48% of respondents scored as low on the scale, with a further 45% indicating medium levels of well-being and less than 6% scoring were in the high group. Significant variance in group allocation was observed.

As seen with the population data, well-being scores demonstrate variance by age and gender and this is reflected in the well-being classifications across the applicant sample. **Respondents who lived alone or were vulnerable were more likely to fall within the low well-being classification.**

Comparisons with the wider population data suggest that receiving scam or nuisance calls, regardless of whether it results in further engagement or financial loss, may negatively impact on an individual's sense of well-being. Over one fifth of respondents reported rarely or never feeling relaxed (25%), optimistic about the future (24%), useful (23%) or close to other people (22%).

## Distribution of Well-Being measures



## Open Comments

All applicants had an opportunity to share any other thoughts in an 'open comments' section. Upon analysis of these comments, the topics discussed by applicants were broken down into the following categories:

- 1) Feelings of anger and frustration (60%)
- 2) Feelings of anxiety and fear (36%)
- 3) Feelings of incompetence or loss of confidence (24%)
- 4) Feeling attacked and intimidated (14%)
- 5) Feelings of sadness and exhaustion (11%)
- 6) Disability and mental health (8%)
- 7) Other (4%)

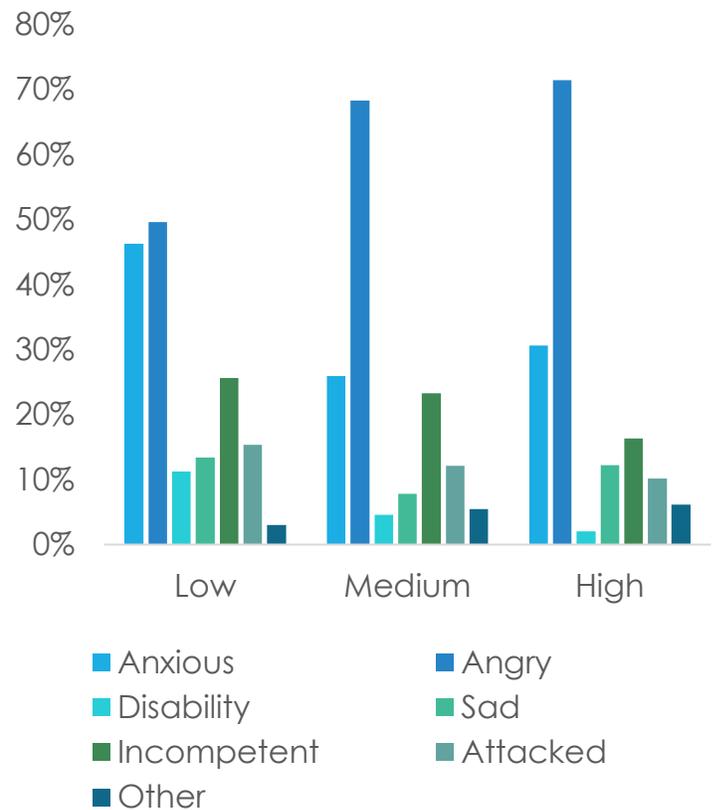
Those who were female, self-identified as vulnerable or who lived alone were more likely to report feelings of anxiety, sadness, or intimidation and less likely to report feelings of anger. However, those who were male, self-identified as not vulnerable or who lived with a partner were more likely to feel report feelings of anger and less likely to report feelings of anxiety, intimidation, or sadness.

Furthermore, those who discussed having a disability were highly likely to also report feelings of anxiety (51%) and discuss how these were linked.

Notably, those in the low category of well-being were significantly more likely to report feeling anxious than those in the high category of well-being, whereas those in the high category of well-being were significantly more likely to report feelings of anger.

There was no significant variation in the levels of anger or anxiety amongst the different age groups; however those in the 55-64 age group were most likely to report feeling sad, vulnerable, and attacked.

Open comments by Well-being



## Well-Being Study Sample

The well-being sample comprises of the 181 participants who completed the SWEMWBS at both installation and three months after installation.

### Sample summary

- ☆ 81% aged 65 or over
- ☆ 59% male, 41% female
- ☆ 66% living with a partner
- ☆ 21% living alone
- ☆ 38% self-identified as vulnerable
- ☆ 99% had received scam or nuisance phone calls in the six months prior to installation
- ☆ 10% reported losing money to scam or nuisance calls in the six months prior to installation
- ☆ 77% reported being worried about losing money to scam or nuisance calls prior to installation

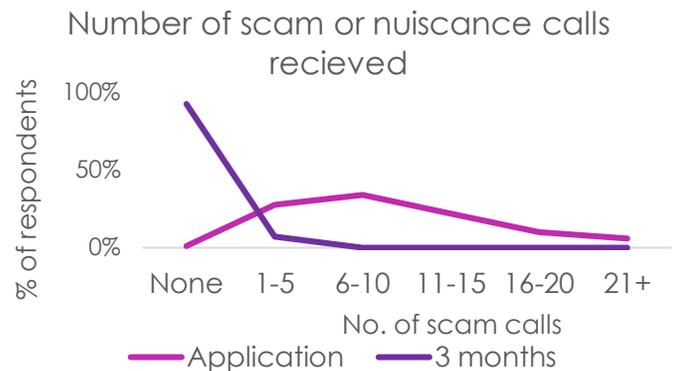
## What impact did the call blocker have?

Three months after installation, applicants were asked to complete a telephone questionnaire. Calls were made by the NTS Scams Team, who received rigorous training to ensure continuity in the application of the SWEMWBS measures. In addition, the NTS Scams Team devised a series of questions designed to capture the impact of the installation of the call blocker.



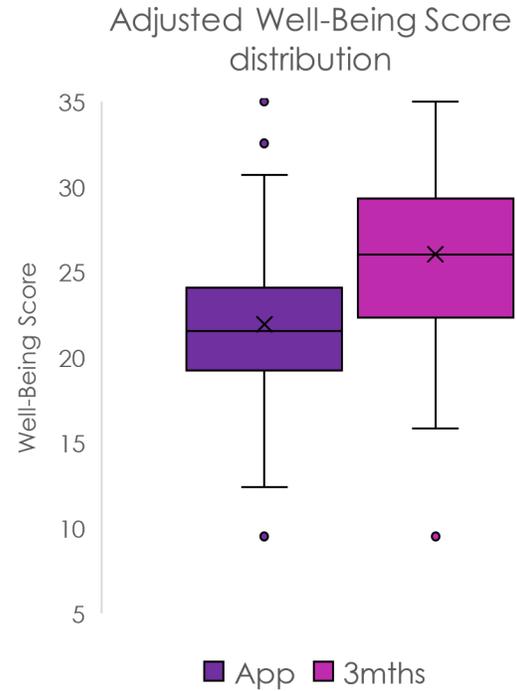
The vast majority of respondents indicated that after three months they felt happier, more confident, and safer; 22% indicated feeling empowered.

After three months, 92% of respondents reported not receiving any scams or nuisance calls and those who did received significantly less. At the time of application, 77% of the sample were concerned about losing money in the future, with this decreasing to 17% three months after installation.

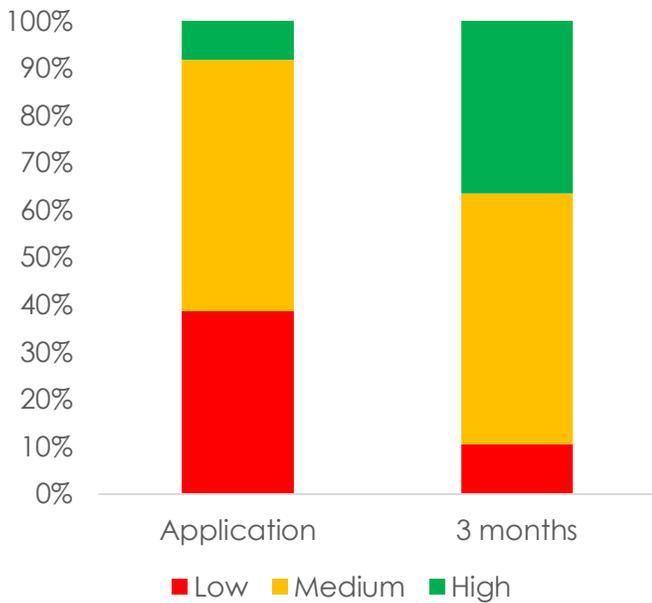


## Impact on Well-Being

At the time of application, respondents reported an average well-being score of 21 and after three months respondents reported a significant increase ( $p < 0.05$ ) in their overall well-being, reporting an average score of 26. This increase is most pronounced for respondents who were classed as vulnerable who reported a lower average well-being score at installation, 20 increasing to 25 after three months. The lowest levels of well-being were observed in respondents under 65 years old.



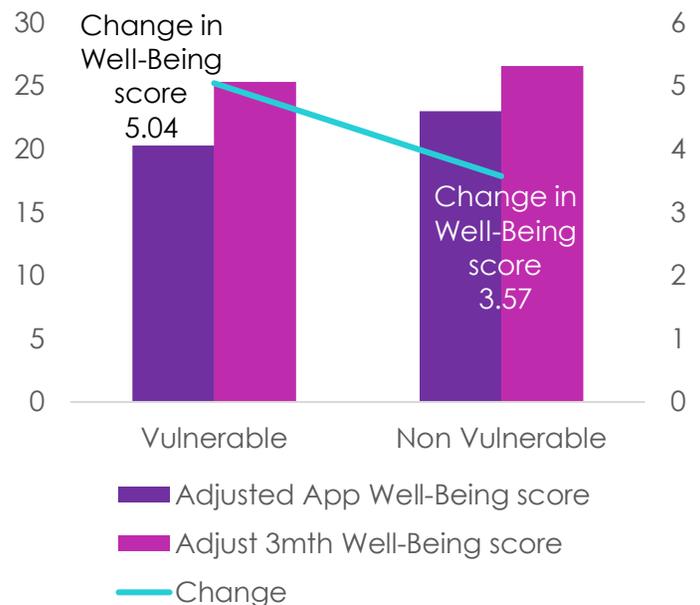
Sample Well-Being Status



The SWEMWBS defines three levels of well-being, low (under 20), medium (between 20 and 28) and high (over 28). At the time of application, 39% of respondents scored as low on the scale and only 8% scored as high on the scale. Conversely, after three months, 37% scored as high and only 11% remained as low.

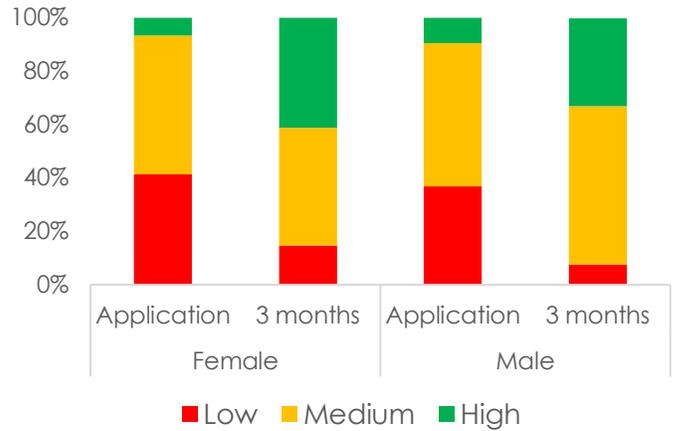
Respondents who indicated that they were within the vulnerable group demonstrated consistently higher increases in their average well-being scores when compared to respondents who were not indicated to belong to this group, suggesting that the call blocker may be of maximum benefit to this group. It should be noted that increases remain significant across both groups.

Adjusted Well-Being Score by vulnerability status

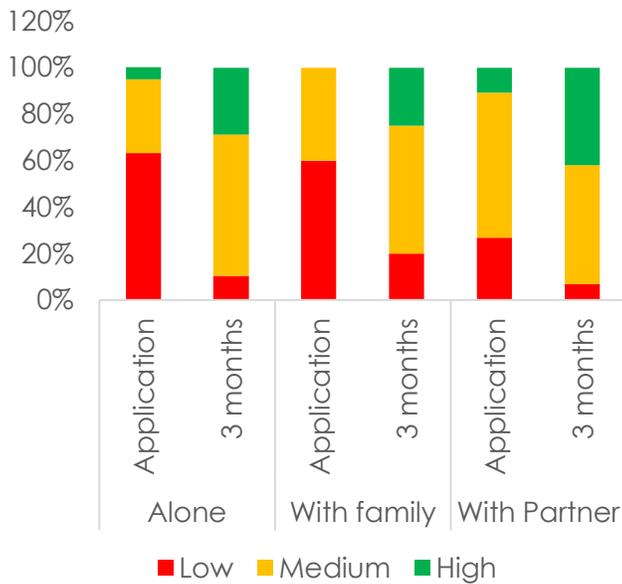


More notable shifts in well-being classification were observed in female participants, with 41% reporting a low well-being score at application decreasing to 15% at three months. Male respondents demonstrated marginally less of an increase, although still demonstrated significant improvements. It is worth noting that male respondents were more likely to be living with a partner than female respondents.

Well-Being Classification by gender



Well-Being Classification by Living status

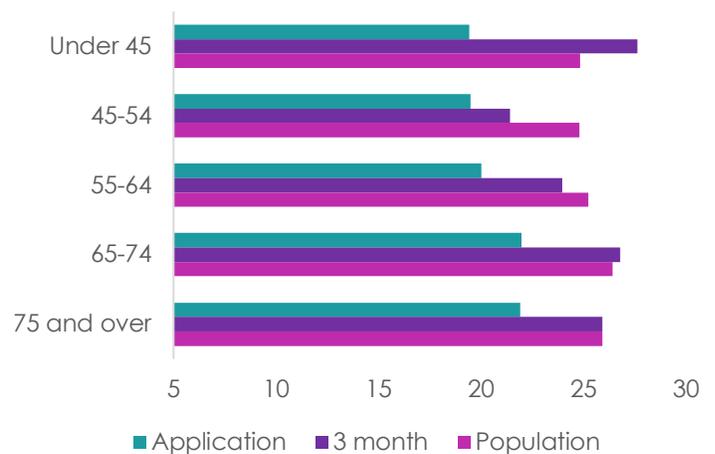


The majority of respondents who lived alone (63%) or with family (60%) initially demonstrated low well-being levels, substantially more than respondents who lived with a partner (27%).

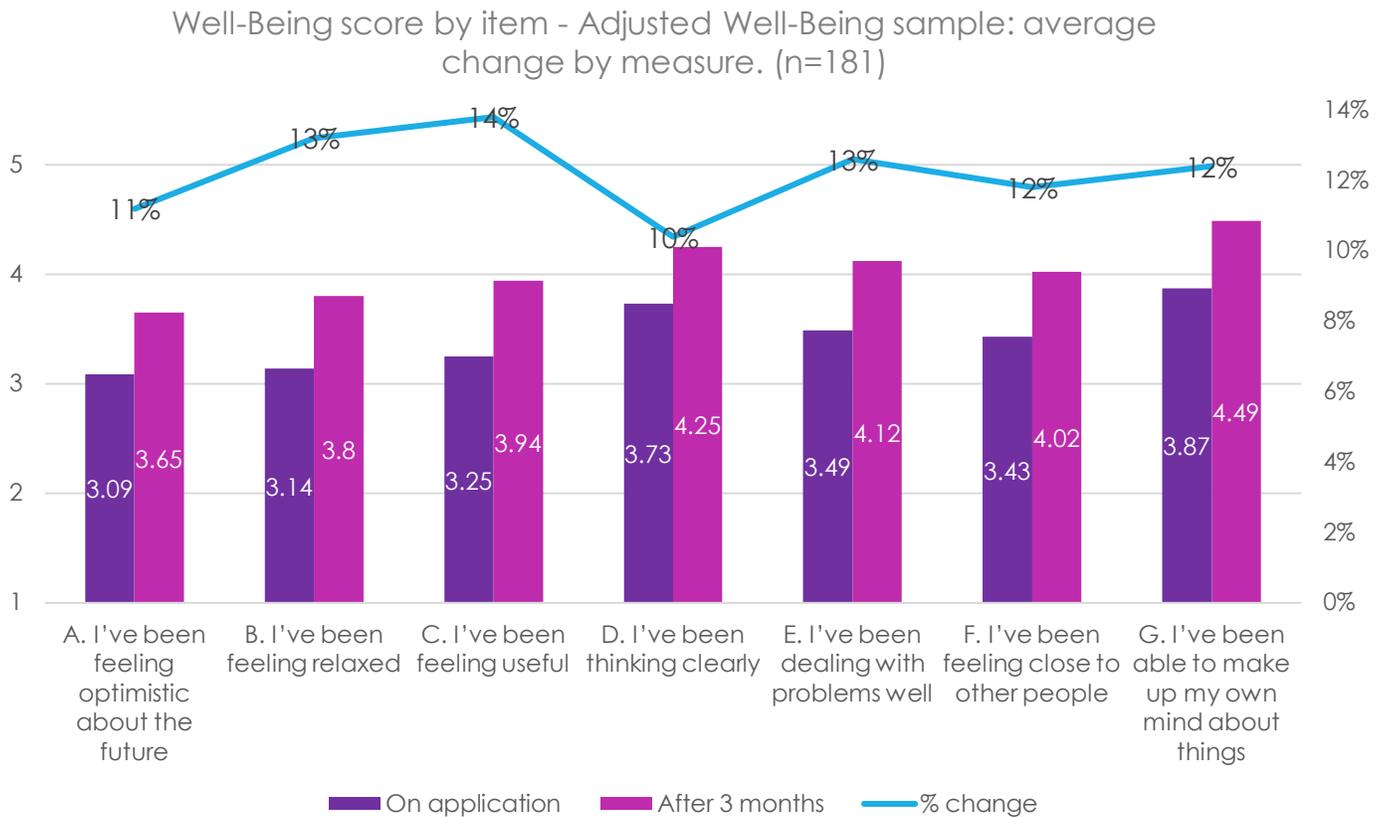
A similar pattern was observed in regard to respondents who considered themselves vulnerable, with 63% indicating a low level of well-being at application, compared to just 28% of respondents who did not regard themselves as vulnerable. Three months after installation, less than 19% of vulnerable respondents remained on a low score and only 5% of the comparison group reported a low well-being score.

There is a significant correlation between well-being score and age; increases in well-being scores were observed over all age groups. Lower increases were observed in the 45-54 age group, although it should be noted that this group is relatively small (n=6). Respondents over the age of 65 demonstrated the highest increases, placing them in line with, or exceeding, the well-being levels of the same age within the wider population.

Adjusted Well-Being score comparison by age group



Significant positive increases were observed in respect to all items in the SWEMWBS, with the highest being reported in relation to respondents feeling useful (+14%), relaxed (+13%) and being able to deal with problems well (+13%).



## Overall impact on Well-Being

Respondents were asked what impact, if any, the installation of a call blocker has had on their well-being. 166 respondents answered this question, with **96% reporting a positive impact on their well-being**; the remaining 4% reported no or little impact. **No respondents reported a negative impact.**

Examples of the types of impact recorded by respondents are included below:

*“Amazing! I was getting so many calls it was so bad. Before I was beginning to doubt myself and uncomfortable and now, I feel myself again it's really made a difference.”*

*“I feel a lot happier as I know I won't get any more scam calls – I am disabled so getting up to answer each call was a nuisance.”*

*“Enormous effect. Prior to the call blocker, I was getting calls on a regular basis. I lost my husband, and this has really helped me feel safer.”*

*“It's brilliant as my husband doesn't answer scam calls anymore and he used to reply to scammers and we lost money to scams. It has all stopped now.”*

# Discussion

Previous research has demonstrated that scam engagement and individual health and well-being are intrinsically linked. This research demonstrates that this relationship may also extend to receiving scams and nuisance calls regardless of whether the individual engages with the caller or not.

Less than 9% of those who applied indicated that they had lost money to scams but this is still a substantial figure, especially if it is replicated over the general population. Significantly lower levels of well-being were recorded over the sample population, suggesting that the calls themselves may lower well-being; this is supported by the majority of respondents, prior to installation, reporting being concerned about becoming a victim to a scam in the future.

Respondents who indicated they felt they were vulnerable or lived alone were more likely to have previously lost money to a scam. This accordingly is related to a lower sense of well-being amongst these groups.

A notable finding was the consistently lower levels of well-being recorded by the SWEMWBS for successful applicants than is observed across the general population. These were consistent over all age groups, although reflecting the patterns observed over the population as a whole, supporting their validity in context.

When considering the well-being sample, we see a significant increase in well-being scores. Respondents over the age of 55 demonstrate an increase from well below the population norm to align within the norms for their age group. This, to a certain degree, supports a targeted approach.

However, significant improvements in well-being scores were observed across all groups, regardless of age, gender, living status and vulnerability status. Supporting the view that there is a potentially significant benefit of installing a call blocker for the well-being of all individuals who receive scam or nuisance calls.

The findings within this report support the installation of a call blocker where an individual is in receipt of scam and nuisance calls, aligning with the Care Act well-being strategy to support personal independence. Although a causal relationship cannot be inferred, the findings suggest that there is a strong interaction between well-being measures and scam and nuisance calls; this has the potential to impact on individual sense of usefulness, ability to deal with problems and ability to feel close to other people.

Further work would be required to ensure that this change is sustained, and although this was originally intended within this project, the impact of COVID-19 on individual well-being may be significant, therefore further data collection at this time would not have been representative of the intervention. The work is timely, however, as future comparisons with population norms may not be so robust.

It is also true that the sample was not only self-selecting but were motivated to apply for a call blocker, suggesting that scam and nuisance calls were of concern to respondents. Results may therefore not be representative of the wider population; however, they do provide a robust subset representing those who are impacted by scam and nuisance calls.



## Conclusions

- Receiving scam and nuisance calls has a significant negative impact on individuals' well-being.
- An individual does not have to engage in a scam for their well-being to be negatively impacted by scam or nuisance calls.
- Installation of the trueCall secure plus call blocker reduces the number of scam and nuisance calls received.
- Call blockers provide an effective intervention against scam and nuisance calls, which remains consistent over all age groups, genders, living arrangements and vulnerability status. This supports the wide application of call blocker and call blocking technology.
- Well-being scores significantly and consistently increased in the three months from the installation of a call blocker.
- Older and vulnerable respondents demonstrated the highest levels of change in well-being, suggesting these groups gain the maximum benefit from the call blocker.

# Recommendations

- 1. There should be greater recognition of the impact that scam and nuisance calls have on well-being, regardless of whether there is actual engagement or any financial loss.** The findings of this research revealed the significant negative impact that simply receiving these types of calls has on individual. This suggests that the scale of people experiencing a negative impact due to scam and nuisance calls is likely to be far larger than the occurrences reported to Action Fraud.
- 2. All regular landline users are likely to benefit from call blocker technology.** Significant increases in well-being were observed across all ages, genders, and levels of vulnerability. Although a lot of work is being done to intercept calls at the source, the adaptive behaviour of these criminals leads the best point of intervention to be at the point of contact.
- 3. Call blockers should be made available to vulnerable individuals to support them to live independently.** Supporting the aims of the Care Act 2014, this research demonstrated how a call blocker can be a vital part of a tool kit to support independent living and to safeguard vulnerable individuals from financial abuse.
- 4. Older people, those who self-identify as vulnerable, and individuals who live alone are most likely to benefit from the installation of a call blocker.** These research findings suggest that increased focus should be placed on these groups, as they are most negatively impacted by experiencing scam and nuisance calls and benefitted the most from the installation of a call blocker.
- 5. Building on the previous work of The National Trading Standards Scams Team, further signposting would help provide clear guidance regarding the application for and the potential benefits of installing a call blocker.** The call blocker utilized within this research led to the substantial and sustained reduction in unwanted calls; however, more research would be required to explore the impacts of different levels of call reduction and the efficacy of alternative call blockers.

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## Appendix – Open Comments

### Feelings of anger and frustration

This was the largest category and it represents those applicants that reported feelings of anger at receiving scam calls and at having their daily life interrupted by these calls. It also included applicants who felt their time was being wasted and who felt they had lost their patience with the calls.

*'Extremely irritated considering they start early morning (08:00) and I have young children.'*

*'Annoyed... really fed up with calls in the early hours. Some calls show withheld, this is really frustrating.'*

*'Annoyed, angry, resentful and frustrated.'*

### Feelings of anxiety and fear

This category included applicants that reported feeling anxious and scared regarding receiving scam calls. They discuss various reactions such as distress and loss of trust in people.

*'Threatened, scared of how my contact details have been obtained. They make me less trusting of people that ring who are not known to me.'*

*'I always worry that these callers are so convincing that they are sure to trap me at some time in the future.'*

### Feelings of incompetence or loss of confidence

This category represents those applicants that reported feeling useless or foolish for falling for scam calls. Many would discuss

how the calls makes them feel old and vulnerable, or that they felt like easy prey.

*'Vulnerable. The scammers' techniques are becoming more and more sophisticated and I am anxious that I will be scammed.'*

*'As a household of myself at age 64 and my husband... age 74, I worry that we will be targeted and be easy prey for scammers.'*

### Feeling attacked and intimidated

The applicants included in this category were those who reported feeling harassed and violated. It also included those who felt that their lives were being intruded upon or disturbed.

*'Calls are intrusive and usually mean I have to interrupt an activity I am involved with.'*

*'I am resentful that thieves are entering my house via the telephone.'*

### Feelings of sadness and exhaustion

This category represents those applicants who discussed feeling upset and worn down. Many applicants even reported feeling depressed and exhausted due to the effects of the scam and nuisance calls.

*'They really wear you down.'*

*'They upset me because I think a friend is ringing and it is someone who doesn't care about me.'*

### Disability and mental health

This category included any applicant that discussed how scam and nuisance calls interacted with their physical or mental health. This included those who were dealing with grief from a loss.

'I am blind. I have bipolar disorder and sleep apnoea. I also have hearing problems. I feel that I am quite often not up to speed. If my wife is out, I worry about answering the phone in case I misunderstand and agree to something silly'

'The almost daily calls constantly interrupt me. As a woman with a disability who often rests during the day it can be very disconcerting'

'I suffer really bad with anxiety and when the phone rings and it's not someone I know I have panic attacks. I'm disabled... I

just can't cope with all these callers.'

### **Other**

Some of the other notable comments included some applicants that felt like they experienced a loss of privacy due to the calls.

'Hugely intrusive into my privacy and well-being as if I am being watched.'

Few also discussed experiences with being scammed and how they wish that more was being done to combat these calls