

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2016-2017

**HEALTH & WELLBEING SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

8TH FEBRUARY 2017

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR,
PUBLIC HEALTH & PROTECTION**

AGENDA ITEM 3
TRADING STANDARDS – PROTECTING VULNERABLE PERSONS

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1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Health & Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee on those aspects of the Trading Standards role that protect vulnerable consumers.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

2.1 Note the content of this report.

2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any matters contained in the report.

3.0 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council has a duty to enforce legislation that falls within the remit of Trading Standards. This enforcement requirement may be delivered through reactive means, such as responding to complaints, or proactive means, such as carrying out inspections, sampling and projects.

3.2 Increasingly, the work of Trading Standards focuses on ensuring that unscrupulous traders are not taking advantage of persons who may be experiencing vulnerability. Vulnerability may be experienced by consumers due to their age, physical circumstances such as disability or personal circumstance such as being financially disadvantaged; vulnerability may also be due to a one-off event, such as following a bereavement. In many of these aspects, and where it is appropriate to do so, Trading Standards works with partners within and without the Council to ensure the most effective use of resource and the best outcome.

3.3 The protection of vulnerable persons is one of the five key objectives of the Wales Heads of Trading Standards; this objective is referenced in the Public Health and Protection Delivery Plan and updated quarterly.

4.0 DOORSTEP CRIME

- 4.1 Doorstep Crime gives rise to civil and criminal offences. Criminals increasingly target the elderly and those living alone, often from examining the external state of a house, or using local knowledge of a particular demographic, to attempt the unsolicited sale of goods and services such as building repairs and improvements. Offences can occur with the act of cold-calling itself, such as refusing to leave when asked by a householder. In addition, should a contract be entered into often Trading Standards receive complaints concerning misleading pricing, failure to complete work or poor standard of workmanship. Working with our partners has identified that doorstep crime often links to distraction burglary.
- 4.2 Annually, Trading Standards take part in the 'Rogue Trader week' campaigns, which both challenge and inform identified traders. Trading Standards also aims to respond to calls concerning doorstep sellers immediately; in some instances raising awareness in the community on social media with positive results. Within the Authority, 404 houses benefit from No Cold Calling Zones, which have been set up by Trading Standards; this has resulted in over 80% of the householders feeling that they and their homes are now safer.

5.0 AGE RESTRICTED SALES

- 5.1 Vulnerability is not restricted to those who are elderly; teenagers often display vulnerability in the choices they may make as they enter maturity. Trading Standards enforces age restrictions on alcohol, tobacco, knives, solvents and e-cigarettes. Ensuring that those underage are protected from purchasing age restricted items by working with and monitoring traders that sell such items, as well as being involved in projects to educate and assist children to make the right choices has an impact on other aspects of Council work, such as Health Promotion and Anti-Social Behaviour. Trading Standards is actively involved in the promotion of licensing objectives, training designated persons and their staff, and providing guidance on schemes such as 'Challenge 21', which reduces the risk of selling items to those under 18 year of age.
- 5.2 Trading Standards is actively involved in the new Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP) in Porth, working closely with Licensing and Community Safety for positive outcomes for children. The CAP launched in Porth in November 2016, is part of a Welsh Government initiative to support areas in Wales in tackling the problems caused by underage drinking and the resulting harm to local communities, such as anti-social behaviour. The success of the launch was mentioned at a CAP 2016 Impact Report event in Westminster.
- 5.3 The aim of the CAP is to educate the public on the impact underage drinking has on communities, and reduce young peoples' access to alcohol by building on existing work already undertaken by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council and South Wales Police in partnership with schools and licensees and providing appropriate positive activity for those young people.
- 5.4 Trading Standards has an ongoing intelligence-led programme of underage-sales test purchases across all aspects of age-restricted goods, the results of

which feed back into the CAP and licensing reports as well as resulting in appropriate investigation for action.

6.0 ANTI-COUNTERFEITING

- 6.1 Anti-counterfeiting no longer consists of poor standard music or clothing. The purchase of counterfeit items undermines honest traders within the County Borough, and even those 'willing victims' who know the item they are purchasing is counterfeit may not have considered other inherent risks: increasingly there is a safety aspect involved with the supply of counterfeit cosmetics, electrical items, toys and car parts.
- 6.2 Those experiencing financial vulnerability may become unwilling victims of counterfeiting: purchasing from whom they believe is just a cheaper supplier they may be inadvertently purchasing counterfeit and unsafe items.
- 6.3 In addition to responding to consumer complaints, Trading Standards monitors social media for sales of counterfeit goods, and is involved in national multi-agency operations which may result in website 'take-downs' as well as investigation and resolution in courts. Appropriate, court-approved and audited surveillance activity may be used to corroborate intelligence of anti-counterfeiting activity, which will lead to warrants of execution, investigation and prosecution where necessary.

7.0 SAFEGUARDING

- 7.1 Dealing with postal and telephone sales scams victims is an ongoing challenge for Trading Standards. These persons can exhibit vulnerability in a number of ways and our work with partners who have experience in dealing with aspects such as loneliness or Alzheimer's is key to a successful outcome.
- 7.2 Once a person becomes a scam victim, they risk being targeted and scammed again, as their details are sold on to other scam companies. To address this, Trading Standards is commencing the installation of call-blocking units in the homes of the most vulnerable persons that are identified as scam victims.

8 CONCLUSION

- 8.1 Trading Standards has an important role in protecting vulnerable persons and disadvantaged communities. Trading Standards no longer has to simply keep up to date with changes in legislation, but changes in tactics used by unscrupulous traders. Officers individually, and the team as a whole, are continually innovating and searching for new ways of operating which will provide the best outcome to support both reputable traders and the consumers of Rhondda Cynon Taf.