

REPORT TO: HOUSING, DUNDEE CONTRACT SERVICES AND ENVIRONMENT SERVICES (9TH JUNE 2008)

REPORT ON: SCAMBUSTERS

REPORT BY: HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH AND TRADING STANDARDS

REPORT NO: 287-2008

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform members of a successful joint bid by Dundee City Council, North Lanarkshire Council, and Consumer Direct Scotland to host a Scotland-wide Trading Standards Scambuster Team to be funded by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR).

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Committee notes the successful bid by the Council, and other partners to jointly host a 'Scambuster' Team capable of covering the whole of Scotland.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 It is proposed that all staff recruited to the team are employed by North Lanarkshire Council and the full budget, amounting to around £800,000 over three years, will be held by North Lanarkshire Council. Subject to an evaluation carried out by BERR to ensure compliance with their criteria, these costs may have to be reviewed, but staff and other resources will be matched accordingly to the outcome of the funding award.
- 3.2 It is expected by BERR that the host authorities will provide some of the support costs "in kind", for example, by providing accommodation and services provided by Public Relations sections. All Scottish Councils' Trading Standards sections will be expected to provide support for work carried out by the team in their area such as enforcement back-up, and equipment whilst pursuing actions uncovered in their areas.
- 3.3 There are no further financial implications to this report.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

- 4.1 Over the last two years BERR (previously the Department of Trade & Industry) has funded three pilot schemes in England aimed at reducing rogue trading practices that affect consumers across wide regional areas. Following the success of these, it was decided to extend them across all English regions and Scotland and Wales. Funding is available from BERR for the three years up to 2011.
- 4.2 It is intended that a scambuster team will concentrate on the type of 'scams' activity that is normally beyond the capacity of individual local authorities to deal with. These will be larger scale illegal activities that operate across local authority boundaries, and it is expected that the team will work across a whole region to identify and eliminate fraudulent trading practices.
- 4.3 The team will be required to demonstrate new ways of working, through targeted, proactive intelligence led enforcement, using data from a variety of sources. They will work with other regulators and enforcers, including the Office of Fair Trading (OFT), HM Revenue and Customs, Benefits Agency etc. to avoid duplication and share intelligence where necessary. The team is also expected to be proactive in warning and educating consumers about dishonest traders and their 'scams' type activity as it arises.

- 4.4 Dundee City and North Lanarkshire Councils joined with Consumer Direct Scotland to put in a bid to host the 'Scambuster' team for Scotland. Bids were also put in by three other Councils, namely Glasgow, City of Edinburgh and South Lanarkshire. The competing bids were evaluated by the Society of Chief Officers of Trading Standards in Scotland (SCOTSS), and after a voting process the North Lanarkshire / Dundee / Consumer Direct proposal was the successful bid by a clear margin, and was submitted to BERR on 28 March 2008.
- 4.5 The proposed team will consist of seven officers, with three based in Dundee, plus a Regional Intelligence Officer who will also act as a liaison with other agencies such as OFT, Police and HM Customs and Revenue.
- 4.6 Based on existing intelligence and priorities, the focus of activities will be around protecting communities from rogue traders, highlighting and addressing areas of widespread consumer detriment in the supply of services, counterfeiting, and doorstep and vehicle crime.

5.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty, Equality Impact Assessment and Risk Management.

The major issues are:

- 5.2 Establishing a 'Scambuster' team will make a positive contribution to the Council's anti-poverty strategy by protecting vulnerable groups who are particularly likely to be at risk from scams and rogue traders, and will target enforcement resources where they can be used for best effect.

6.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive
Depute Chief Executive (Support Services)
Depute Chief Executive (Finance)
Head of Finance

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

Albert Oswald
Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards

May 2008