

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE
(18TH SEPTEMBER 2006)

REPORT ON: TRUSTED TRADER PARTNERSHIP SCHEME

REPORT BY: HEAD OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & TRADING STANDARDS

REPORT NO: 535-2006

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides an update on the operation of the Dundee 'Trusted Trader' local business partnership scheme, launched in March 2005.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the committee notes the successes of the Dundee 'Trusted Trader' partnership scheme to date, and agrees that it be maintained and expanded as outlined in this report.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 None

3.2 There has been no charge for membership of the scheme since it was launched and management of the scheme is accommodated within current Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department resources.

3.3 Processing of customer survey data is carried out independently by Referenceline Ltd, and any future costs associated with this will be met by the members of the scheme.

4.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 People live without fear of crime: These proposals help prevent doorstep crime, improve community safety, and make citizens more confident in buying goods and services from their own home without fear of fraud or lack of redress.

5.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Committee report 145-2005 of 21st February 2005 outlined the launch of the Trusted Trader good trader scheme, which is intended to improve consumer confidence and community wellbeing in a number of ways:

- By reducing the availability of work for bogus or itinerant traders

- By highlighting and helping firms who deliver high quality services
- By providing a facility for word of mouth references for consumers
- By ensuring member firms abide by a code of practice

The scheme currently operates in two sectors, property maintenance and vehicle servicing - sectors that were identified as posing particular risks of consumer detriment or community safety. Member firms undertake to abide by a Code of Practice, and their work is assessed by their own customers through a questionnaire system operated by a third party - Referenceline Limited.

7.0 UPDATE

- 7.1 Market penetration of the scheme has been excellent with 30% of businesses in the targeted sectors having joined the scheme. Total membership is now 76 including the City Council's own Pest Control Service which is one of the scheme's best performers. Traders in these existing sectors are being revisited to increase membership, now that the benefits of the scheme are more easily apparent.
- 7.2 The scheme has a wide application for highlighting good business practices and customer service, and businesses are currently being consulted with the aim of expanding the scheme into new sectors such as small retailers.
- 7.3 Marketing of the scheme has been very successful with a wide range of media used, from fridge magnets for households, to street broadcast on lamp posts, to features in local newspapers and magazines. The main source of public information is from the www.trustedtrader.info website which contains all the qualitative data from customer responses, with some firms having over 100 references from customers available for view. Discussions are ongoing with the Leisure and Communities Department in respect of distributing material through community outlets.
- 7.4 Accreditation is an important aspect of quality and the original report envisaged the scheme being able to meet the criteria of the Office of Fair Trading Consumer Codes Approval Scheme. In the interim a new initiative, the Local Authority Assured Trader Scheme Network, has been launched specifically for local authority schemes. Its aim is to bring greater consistency to local trader schemes, and assist in their promotion to local consumers and business. Trusted Trader meets the scheme criteria and an application has been made to join.
- 7.5 The scheme was nominated for two awards during 2006, a COSLA Excellence Award, and a Trading Standards Institute Brindley Medal Award for excellence and innovation. It was unsuccessful in the COSLA application but reached the semi-final stage of the TSI award.
- 7.6 Trusted Trader outcomes have been positive over 2005/06:
- Property maintenance work complaints from consumers reduced from 186 to 99
 - vehicle servicing complaints reduced from 52 to 47
 - Increasing trends in website usage
 - Increasing trends in consumer satisfaction
- 7.7 The original report included a recommendation that good practice guidelines in visiting citizens in their homes be adopted by all Dundee City Council Departments. Although work to implement that proposal is ongoing, Trading Standards will continue to work with other agencies to ensure that the utmost is done, in respect of doorstep callers, to maintain community safety.

8.0 CONSULTATIONS

8.1 The Chief Executive
Depute Chief Executive (Support Services)
Depute Chief Executive (Finance)

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

10.0 SIGNATURE

Albert Oswald
Head of Environmental Health & Trading Standards

September 2006