

To: Communities Policy Overview Committee – 2nd April 2008

From: Mike Hill, Portfolio Holder, Amanda Honey, Managing Director, Communities

Subject: Controlled Cold-calling Zones

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary

This report identifies the background to the experimental establishment of a Controlled Cold-Calling Zone in Cranbrook, draws conclusions, and identifies next steps.

FOR INFORMATION

1. Background

- 1.1 Cold Calling Controlled Zones (CCCZ), often referred to as No Cold Calling Zones, were developed after increasing evidence showed that there was a link between distraction burglary, targeted cold calling and the associated criminality. This link was first noted as a result of a high profile case in the North of England involving an elderly vulnerable lady who was repeatedly targeted for money. Eventually her entire savings were taken, her health rapidly deteriorated and she died.
- 1.2 Further research in Kent and other parts of the country revealed a disturbing picture of gangs cold calling targeted, mainly elderly and vulnerable people, offering to carry out repairs and maintenance on their property. The work was often not needed, or carried out to a substandard level, the original agreed price was often hugely increased and in the background might be threats if payment was not handed over. Until this time the problem had remained largely unseen as elderly and vulnerable people were usually reluctant to complain about an activity which perhaps might portray them in a poor light and often complaints were not handled by the Police as they were largely seen as civil disputes between a trader and customer.

2. Trading Standards reactive response

- 2.1 In response, Kent Trading Standards developed a Rapid Response team to react by supporting potential victims by directly intervening between the customer and the 'trader' and if necessary carrying out follow up activities.
Our experience was that if we could get there quickly enough we had a good chance of ensuring that price increases were avoided and in many cases the 'trader' left without asking for payment.
- 2.2 To ensure that we were given the information quickly enough to react we worked with every bank, building society and post office in the County asking them to

contact us if it seemed that an apparently vulnerable person was withdrawing significant sums of cash to pay for this type of service. In addition we trained a large number of key Social Services and private sector staff so that the message was filtered down to the many thousands of carers across the County to be aware of the existence of this problem.

3. Trading Standards preventive response

- 3.1 Kent Trading Standards also developed the TS Alert system (e mail) to provide timely warning and information directly to communities and partner organisations when we received information about “rogues” or other similar suspicious trading activity in their areas. This activity is in line with the 2010 target no 68.
- 3.2 As part of the preventive agenda Trading Standards services nationally aim to assist and support the establishment of targeted Controlled Cold-Calling Zones (CCCZ) where there is highest need against the following criteria
 - Housing where there are elderly or vulnerable people
 - Reported incidents of Cold Calling
 - Reported incidents of Distraction Burglary
 - Reported incidents of Burglary
 - Crime hotspots
- 3.3 The purpose of selecting an area on these criteria is to overcome any criticism or legal challenge there may be about restricting legitimate lawful trade. It also allows resources to be directed at the most vulnerable members of a community.
- 3.4 National guidance indicates that the size of the CCCZ should ideally be relatively small (30 to 50 properties) however, they can be larger if the area is easily identifiable or has set boundaries, e.g. a street, housing block, cul de sac, or a Neighbourhood Watch area. The scheme should provide the residents with confidence to refuse cold callers and give them the awareness to report the call to the Police, Community Wardens or Trading Standards officers. In order not to devalue the scheme a minimum response should have been agreed by the partners.
- 3.5 To ensure these schemes are successful and as effective as possible they require partner agencies to cooperate, usually under the leadership of a local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Community Safety Partnership or local Neighbourhood Watch Organisation (NHW) but they usually also involve many other agencies and the voluntary sector.
- 3.6 It is essential to consult the people in the area that may be affected and not to impose it on a community. This is in the context of a national survey by the Trading Standards Institute in 2002, involving feedback from 9,000 randomly selected households showed that 96% of people did not want any cold-callers and virtually nobody actually welcomed them. It should be noted in this context that this finding has been challenged by the Direct Selling Association and the Office of Fair

Trading have some concerns over the 'outlawing' of cold calling, as direct selling has been instrumental in increasing market place competition particularly in the utilities supply industry.

- 3.7 Funding of schemes is simplified if the process outlined for selection of a Zone is followed. The boundaries of the Zone need to be clearly marked with signage and promotional material prepared for the residents and for those traders that may be affected. The Cranbrook scheme was funded by the partnership members and also received some additional sponsorship from British Telecom. The cost was around £2500 (promotional information printing £1000, road signage £600), plus staff time.

4. The Cranbrook pilot CCCZ and evaluation

- 4.1 The Cranbrook Cold Calling Zone was established in March 2006 and was headed by the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership and in particular the Community Liaison Officer for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council. The scheme also had support from Kent Police, KCC Community Wardens and Trading Standards.

- 4.2 Following the introduction of the scheme, a survey by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council in 2007 led to a high number of responses (446 respondents from a survey size of 1283). The detail of question and responses are attached as Appendix 1 and the key findings include:

- The question "do you feel safer" received an 82% "yes" return.
- 37% of the respondents were over 70 years old, indicating that the zone is having an impact on a particularly vulnerable section of people
- there is a high level of awareness of the zone standing at 81%
- Trading Standards have received only four reports of cold callers in the area
- There have been no reported incidents of distraction burglary since the introduction of the Zone

- 4.3 In addition, West Kent Police report:

- 37.5% reduction in domestic burglary
- 24% reduction in other types of burglary
- 30% reduction in theft from vehicles
- 39% reduction in theft of vehicles
- 50% reduction in vehicle interference

since the introduction of the zone

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 Legal opinion sought by the Office of Fair Trading concluded that schemes or Zones that simply “ban” cold calling without justification could be illegal and therefore could be challenged. Kent Trading Standards service does not therefore actively assist or become named partners in schemes that do not use the criteria for selection. However, we will still react and attempt to intervene in appropriate cases of actual cold calling that are reported to us.
- 5.2 It is difficult to prove conclusively that the Cranbrook Cold Calling Zone was directly responsible for reducing crime. There is however evidence that the public do like these schemes and that, in the pilot in Cranbrook, residents felt safer as a result. Studies of Cold Calling Zones in other parts of England have also shown a link between the scheme and crime levels and we are therefore actively assisting in setting up a number of similar schemes, based on intelligence led targeting of resources.
- 5.3. The following schemes are either in operation or being set up:
- Tunbridge Wells - 4 new zones plus the existing Cranbrook CCCZ
 - Sevenoaks - are proposing a similar number
 - Gravesham - are currently proposing 6 zones
 - Maidstone - have launched 3 zones and are currently considering an additional one in the Marden area
 - Swale - has started discussions regarding a trial zone.
- 5.4 Trading Standards provide staffing within existing resources as outlined in the Operational Business Plan. Similarly, each partner contributes funding from within their own resources.

6. Recommendation

- 6.1 Members are asked to NOTE this report

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Results of No Cold Calling Survey in Cranbrook Feb/Mar 2007

Total		Percentage
Survey Total	1283	
Responses	446	34.76%

(1) Male/Female		Percentage
Responses	441	
Males	158	36%
Females	283	64%

(2) Age Group		Percentage
Responses	445	
1=<50	96	22%
2=50-60	84	19%
3=60-65	52	12%
4=65-70	46	10%
5=>70	166	37%

(3) Aware of CCCZ		Percentage
Responses	442	
Yes	360	81%
No	81	18%
Don't Know	1	0%

(4) Cold Called?		Percentage
Responses	434	
Yes	154	35%
No	271	61%
Don't Know	9	2%

(4) How Many Times?		Percentage
Once	88	
Twice	52	
Three	15	
More than Three times	10	

(5) Did you Buy?		Percentage
Responses	313	
Yes	11	4%
No	302	96%

(6) Do you use a Chain?		Percentage
Responses	308	
Yes	67	22%
No	232	75%
Don't Know	9	3%

(7) Do you ask for ID?		Percentage
Responses	257	
Yes	121	47%
No	124	48%
Don't Know	12	5%

(8) Did you report the caller?		Percentage
Responses	195	
Yes	8	4%
No	187	96%

(9) Have you ever been a victim?		Percentage
Responses	406	
Yes	22	5%
No	384	95%

(10) Did you tell anyone?		Percentage
Responses	36	
Yes	25	69%
No	11	31%

(11) Know who to contact?		Percentage
Responses	430	
Yes	206	48%
No	224	52%

(12) Do you feel safer?		Percentage
Responses	399	
Yes	327	82%
No	72	18%

(13) Expanded?		Percentage
Responses	412	
Yes	395	96%
No	15	4%
Don't Know/No opinion	2	0%