
Meeting of the Executive Member For Neighbourhood Services and Advisory Panel

4th September 2008

Report of the Director of Neighbourhood Services

Regional Scambuster Team

Summary

1. To inform members of an initiative by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) to establish regional trading standards 'Scambuster Teams' to tackle cross boundary rogue trading.
2. To inform members that City of York Council were successful in their bid to attract approximately £750k of grant funding over 3 years to establish and host a scambusting team on behalf of the Yorkshire and the Humber region.

Background

3. The Department of Trade and Industry's (now BERR) 2005 Consumer Strategy "A Fair Deal for All", set out a commitment to fund regional Trading Standards Scambuster Team (SBT) pilots. The strategy recognised that enforcement needs to be more effective at stopping those deliberately set out to defraud consumers and who operate across geographical boundaries.
4. Pilot SBTs were established in three English regions in 2006, focusing on the hardest to tackle scams and rogue trading activities which go beyond the boundaries of one local authority. They quickly established their effectiveness and have already:
 - Achieved an estimated £3m savings for consumers
 - Seized £2m worth of criminal assets
 - Uncovered an estimated £16m worth of fraud
5. Following a review of the pilots, BERR announced new funding for SBTs to cover Scotland, Wales and all the nine regions of England. The government allocated £7.5 million to the project and the funding will cover the period up until 31st March 2011.
6. The BERR criteria for a SBT is that they should focus on larger scale scams by working on a regional basis, separate from day to day work of a specific trading standards authority, and so work across administrative and geographic boundaries. Examples of the types of issues the SBTs are targeting are:

- Doorstep crime where there is evidence of multiple incidents across local authority borders
- Car clocking operations
- Deceptive selling techniques, particularly those targeting vulnerable consumers working from home, and other “get rich quick” schemes
- The sale of dangerous and substandard goods from traders operating with no fixed address e.g. furniture
- Cowboy builders who cost homeowners thousands of pounds in shoddy and unnecessary building work
- Large scale, organised counterfeiting operations

The Yorkshire and the Humber Trading Standards Group SBT

7. In April 2008 trading standards regional groups were invited to submit bids for funding to establish a SBT. Following discussions in the Yorkshire and Humber Trading Standards Group (which consists of the heads of trading standards services in Barnsley MBC, City of York Council, Doncaster MBC, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Hull City Council, North East Lincolnshire Council, North Lincolnshire Council, North Yorkshire County Council, Rotherham MBC, Sheffield City Council and West Yorkshire Joint Services) it was decided that City of York Council would lead the project and submit the bid on behalf of the group. The bid was successful and BERR have agreed to give a grant of £749,600 to City of York Council to set up the SBT, to cover the period 1st April 2008 – 31st March 2011.
8. The SBT will consist of a manager and three investigators and will be based in York. These appointments will be made on either a fixed term contract or secondment basis, and on a salary level which equates to the level of responsibility, and which has been approved by the CYC Pay and Grading Review Panel. It is hoped that the team will be in place and operational by end of October 2008.
9. The SBT will use intelligence from a variety of sources, including the Consumer Direct consumer complaint database, to identify and prioritise ‘targets’ and ‘problems’ which require enforcement intervention or which sectors of trading activities require targeted education to raise consumer and business awareness of rogue trading practices and counterfeiters in their area.

Consultation

10. Legal services have been consulted on the drafting of a cross border authorisation agreement for SBT officers, the practicalities of instituting legal proceedings in other areas and the establishment of appropriate secondment arrangements.

Options

11. Not applicable, for information only.

Analysis

12. Not applicable, for information only.

Corporate Priorities

13. The establishment of a SBT supports the corporate priority 'to reduce the actual and perceived impact of violent, aggressive and nuisance behaviour on people in York' and will help reduce the economic detriment caused to York residents and businesses through rogue trading.

Implications

14. The assessment of implications is as follows:
 - **Financial:** None. The funding of the team is from BERR grant.
 - **Human Resources (HR):** None. Temporary posts will be created.
 - **Equalities:** None.
 - **Legal:** There is likely to be an increase in the number of prosecutions undertaken. Provision for additional legal costs has been made in the bid.
 - **Crime and Disorder:** The SBT aims to tackle the worst instances of rogue trading.
 - **Information Technology (IT):** The SBT will need to be equipped for mobile working away from the council area. The cost of this is to be met by the allocated funding.
 - **Property:** None
 - **Other:** None identified

Risk Management

15. In compliance with the council's risk management strategy. There are no major risks associated with the recommendations of this report.

Recommendations

16. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member to note the contents of this report.

Reason: To make members aware of the establishment of the Regional Scambuster Team, with York as the host authority.

Contact Details

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Report Approved



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Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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Wards Affected:

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers

None