

report



meeting COUNTY COUNCIL

date 22 July 2010

agenda item number

7a v.

REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY

REPORT FOR THE PERIOD JUNE – JULY 2010

1. I am very pleased to present my report to Council as the Community Safety Portfolio Holder on the varied activities that have taken place within it. I hope you find the report of interest and I will be very happy to provide further information on any subject it covers.

SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Community Safety Event

2. The Safer Communities team worked in partnership with the police and Retford Action Centre to organise a community safety event on 8 July at The Butter Market in Retford. The event was designed to provide information for the over 50s on a range of issues such as staying safe in your home, the work of trading standards and local neighbourhood committees and community transport. The event finished with a play dealing with distraction burglaries.

TRADING STANDARDS

Dangerous Portable Laser Devices

3. Members will recall the concerns raised during the last Council Meeting regarding the availability of a dangerous hand held laser. The product is being advertised over the internet from a company based in China. In response to our concerns, Trading Standards Officers have been investigating the availability of the product. Initial work indicates that over 500 hundred have been ordered, but it appears that none have been delivered. Further, we can find no evidence of anyone reselling this

particular laser over the internet from a European or UK based company at present. Trading Standards Officers have also been establishing whether the laser is available from local sources – they have been visiting markets and so far there have been no indications of this product being sold.

4. We have also liaised with the Department of Business, Innovation & Skills who will raise the issue within the European Forum for Safety, and I have written to the Secretary of State raising our concerns and calling for action by the Government.

Protecting Vulnerable Consumers

5. Trading Standards Officers recently intervened when an elderly resident was cold called by someone who pressure-washed her patio and demanded £500 in payment. Officers advised the resident of her rights and she subsequently paid a substantially reduced sum.
6. Officers were also able to resolve a dispute between a vulnerable resident and an alarm company. The company had provided the alarm 'free', but the resident was then locked in to paying significant sums for fitting, and for 5 years of telephone monitoring. Trading Standards had the contract cancelled, and the consumer was allowed to keep the alarm unit without telephone monitoring. The business was known to Trading Standards Officers; it had previously signed an undertaking with Derbyshire Trading Standards to improve its behaviour. Their activities will now be closely monitored.

Availability of Knives to Young People

7. A joint Trading Standards and Police campaign began in June to tackle the supply of knives and combat weaponry to children. The first step was to test whether high street retailers would sell items to our 16 year old volunteer. Unfortunately, 16 out of 37 retail outlets visited sold knives to our volunteer. The team also examined the accessibility of knives to young people over the internet.
8. The retailers concerned will be summoned to a meeting where a relative of a victim of a knife attack will emphasize the devastating impact of knife crime. At the same time, they will also be advised by both trading standards and police officers on how to prevent sales to people below the legal age limit and the consequences of future breaches. Follow up test purchases will be carried out and having been given this initial advice and support, further failures will be dealt with strongly.

Licensed Premise Audits

9. As part of an ongoing initiative to reduce the availability of alcohol to young people, a joint Trading Standards and Police operation began in June. The operation involved 50 compliance visits to suspected problem 'off-licenses' in anti-social behaviour hotspots in Mansfield, Ashfield and Bassetlaw to detect poor management practices that can result in underage alcohol sales.
10. The comprehensive audits allowed Trading Standards to provide detailed support and guidance, particularly to small and medium-sized businesses to prevent non-deliberate sales. This then allows future enforcement resources to be targeted against those who ignore advice or who deliberately sell to children.

Regional Operations Unit (Scambuster Team)

- 11 As previously highlighted, Trading Standards are concerned about the increasing numbers of complaints regarding unscrupulous mobility aid companies. One Nottinghamshire company has been the subject of an investigation by the Unit following complaints of non-supply of goods, and failure to pay off existing credit agreements, leaving victims paying twice. In some cases they have been repeatedly targeting vulnerable victims "upgrading" their equipment far more often than is necessary.
- 12 In June the Unit working with Nottinghamshire Trading Standards and the police executed warrants at premises, seizing a large amount of documentation and arresting two people. The investigation will enable us to identify many more customers who might have fallen victim.
13. In a previous report I highlighted an investigation by the ROU into a major counterfeiting operation bringing inferior and sometimes dangerous copies of famous brands into the UK. The initial raids took place last summer, but such was the size of the operation that it took several months to prepare the case for court. Three people will now answer fraud and trade marks charges at Nottingham Crown Court in August.

Legal Update

14. A Newark motor trader was recently convicted for supplying a motor vehicle in an unroadworthy condition. The vehicle was found to have long standing corrosion, rendering the car in a dangerous condition. The seller was also convicted for failing to state his name on the receipt given. The trader was fined £200 and compensation of £595 was ordered to be paid to the purchaser.

15. The trial of a number individuals mis-selling remedial damp proofing work and other building work to the elderly and vulnerable has now been put back to November. However, out of 7 seven defendants who originally denied the allegations, 3 have now pleaded guilty.
16. The pilot project recently conducted at the site of the Experimental Weight Restriction Order on Mile End Road, Colwick has so far resulted in 12 Simple Cautions, and 5 Formal Warnings being issued to drivers of heavy commercial vehicles who breached the Order. Action against these people will be escalated if they are caught again.

COUNCILLOR MICK MURPHY
Cabinet Member for Community Safety