

## Consumer Services Policy

In providing consumer services we aim to safeguard communities. We achieve this by concentrating on the following key areas of activity:

- (1) Working with the Citizens Advice consumer service which provides consumers with information and advice
- (2) Safeguarding vulnerable people and communities by addressing rogue doorstep trading and scams; tackling the supply of age restricted products to young people and the supply of illicit tobacco and alcohol; and ensuring the safety of goods and food standards
- (3) Protecting consumers by targeting the most serious fraudulent, illegal and unfair trading
- (4) Safeguarding vulnerable people and communities by operating a number of initiatives, including No Cold Calling Zones, **Community and** Consumer Champions, Scam Alerts and Home Shield Norfolk
- (5) Providing a Trusted Trader scheme.

### **(1) Working with the Citizens Advice Consumer Service which provides consumers with information and advice**

We work in partnership with the Citizens Advice Consumer Service which provides information and advice to consumers to enable them to:

- avoid problems with traders,
- make informed choices in future transactions, and
- deal with problems should they arise.

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service provides consumer information via their Adviceguide website:

<http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/england.htm>

They also provide a dedicated, **professional** telephone advice service. The Citizens Advice consumer helpline provides free, confidential, impartial **and informed** advice on issues around buying goods or services. This includes being treated unfairly by a trader, receiving a poor service, wanting to cancel a contract or switch energy suppliers.

This service is freely available to both consumers and businesses. The Citizens Advice consumer helpline can be contacted on 03454 04 05 06 (minicom users should dial 18001 first) or by using the online form. The helpline is open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, excluding bank and public holidays.

The Citizens Advice Consumer Service, including the helpline, shares all its consumer enquiry data with Trading Standards; as it is generated. We monitor and act on this information as set out below.

## **(2) Safeguarding vulnerable people and communities by addressing rogue doorstep trading and scams; tackling the supply of age restricted products to young people and the supply of illicit tobacco and alcohol; and ensuring the safety of goods and food standards**

The Citizens Advice consumer helpline will immediately transfer to us those matters considered to be urgent. For example:

- Doorstep rogue traders – uninvited traders in the middle of work or returning later
- Safety complaints – where an unsafe product has caused injury or damage to property or there is an immediate risk of injury
- Short measure deliveries of heating fuel, coal or sand & ballast

We receive a wide range of information, intelligence and data from our partner agencies; including industry bodies and enforcement agencies. We monitor this data, together with that supplied by the Citizens Advice Consumer Service and from this identify trading malpractice by individual traders or market sectors. We target our resources towards those businesses or sectors which are causing the greatest detriment to consumers. We do this by providing information, advice and support or, sometimes, by taking formal enforcement action to ensure they comply with the law.

## **(3) Protecting consumers by targeting the most serious fraudulent, illegal and unfair trading**

Enforcement action is undertaken in accordance with our Enforcement Policy. Whilst recognising that most traders want to comply with legal requirements, we also recognise that some will operate outside the law (both intentionally and unintentionally). A staged

approach to enforcement will therefore be adopted, with advice and informal action fully explored to resolve the matter in the first instance, if appropriate. However we will consider taking immediate formal action for the most serious breaches, which may include:

- Where there is a significant risk to public health, safety or wellbeing, or damage to property, infrastructure or the environment, or
- Fraud or deceptive/misleading practices that affect the collective interests of Norfolk based businesses or consumers.

Where we take enforcement action as a result of information we receive the focus is on bringing the business(es) into compliance with trading standards. We do not resolve individual disputes with a trader; although our enforcement action will provide support to victims. This may include seeking compensation during court proceedings.

#### **(4) Safeguarding vulnerable people and communities by operating a number of initiatives, including No Cold Calling Zones, Community and Consumer Champions, Scam Alerts and Home Shield Norfolk**

**No Cold Calling Zones** are designated areas where the resident community declares they no longer wish to accept traders calling at their homes without an appointment. The main aim of the zones is to reduce cold calling by unwanted traders.

**Our Community and Consumer Champions** network aims to make it easier for everyone to access information about consumer matters.

- **Community Champions:**
  - are professionals in the community who help us safeguard vulnerable people
  - provide information and intelligence to our service about rogue trading
  - support our service to deliver information and assistance.
- **Consumer Champions:**
  - act as a local point of contact to signpost people to the most appropriate source of advice, support and information
  - pass on relevant information or news to the local community. This could be about the latest scam or rogue traders operating in the area
  - alert Trading Standards to any trading related problems arising in the community.

Consumer **Scam Alerts** are available via our website, our Twitter account @NorfolkCCTS and our Facebook page. To sign up to our business scam alerts by email go to our Trading Standards Scam awareness and advice page.

**Home Shield Norfolk** is a cross-agency referral service for professionals who work with vulnerable people and their carers. The scheme aims to find ways to support people and help them to stay safe, healthy and happy in their own homes. If, in the course of a normal working day, a professional finds an individual with needs which their organisation cannot address, they can be referred to Home Shield. With the individual's consent, the issues or concerns are recorded on a referral form by the professional which is then sent to Home Shield, who then endeavours to refer the individual onto another organisation that may be able to help meet their needs.

#### **(5) Providing a Trusted Trader Scheme**

Our Trusted Trader scheme provides information to help consumers find reputable traders. Traders on the scheme agree to comply with consumer protection law and to follow good business practice. Consumers can check out customer feedback via our website prior to engaging with a trader and, should a problem arise which cannot be resolved with the trader, Trading Standards offers a dispute resolution procedure via **Ombudsman Services, a national scheme which operates independently to resolve complaints between consumers and businesses that are signed up to the scheme.**

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