

Report to: Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 11th July 2019

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection and Safer Communities

Report Authors: Built Environment and Public Protection Manager & Public Protection Business Manager

Title: No Cold Calling control in Denbighshire

1. What is the report about?

1.1 Information on the administration of No Cold Calling Zones in the County and proposals for operational change.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 To provide information on the proposals for the process of introducing No Cold Calling Zones in the future.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Members:

- comment on the contents of the report, and;
- Support the proposed approach

4. Report details

4.1 A No Cold Calling Zone is an area in which residents have stated they do not wish to receive unsolicited visits to their homes (cold calls) from businesses. The zones are set up by the Council's Trading Standards Team working in partnership with North Wales Police. The No Cold Calling Zones are intended to protect vulnerable consumers from doorstep criminals and unwanted sales visits, raise householder awareness and help reputable businesses to avoid visiting areas where they are not welcome.

4.2 There are currently around 355 zones across the county covering over 8000 houses (Appendix 1). These were all implemented by Trading Standards officers between 2007 and 2016 at the request of residents and/or North Wales Police.

4.3 The current process for introducing a zone involves a public consultation with all residents in that zone – usually led by Police Community Support officers or Neighbourhood Watch – and where a majority of residents want a zone it can be implemented. Requests for a zone can come from residents or public authorities where they have identified issues of rogue trader activity and/or significant number of potentially vulnerable residents live. Consultation is generally through word of mouth,

leaflet drop and, if necessary, a public meeting, which can range from informal roadside meet and greet to a more formal meeting at a specific venue.

- 4.4 In a zone, the residents collectively agree not to deal with traders who call uninvited at their door to sell products. There is usually a sign on a lamppost at each end of the zone (typically a street, or series of streets) and stickers for each householder to display in their door/window to inform cold calling traders that they are not welcome.
- 4.5 The signs and stickers are effective as they give residents a particular reason, and the confidence, to turn such traders away. Residents can report anyone cold calling in the zone to Trading Standards Officers or North Wales Police who may take appropriate action, such as attending the scene or writing to the business and ask them not to do so in future – a record of which is retained on internal databases and the intelligence is shared on national intelligence databases and, as such, can support action against particular problem traders. Offences may exist where traders do not leave a property when asked or continue to call unannounced. Residents are always advised to close their doors and report the incident, especially where someone is refusing to leave the property when asked, and in which case they should contact the police.
- 4.6 The signs and stickers, have historically been provided by the Council through the Trading Standards team. The estimated average cost of a road sign is £200 and the majority of the road signs were erected pre-2014 and a significant number of zones have been implemented or changed since that date or signs have been removed for various reasons. There is no data available to indicate how many zones do not have appropriate signage but it is anticipated to be a large proportion, thus placing a financial burden on the Council.
- 4.7 Discussions with the Community Safety team of North Wales Police confirmed that they have similar resource constraints and are unable to support formal consultation to reinvigorate existing zones or the establishment of new ones. They have indicated that they are able to offer support to doorstep crime victims and will respond to reports of unsolicited traders where there is a risk to a householder. However, they strongly suggest that reports of traders ignoring Cold Calling signs and other less urgent issues should be reported through other existing routes e.g. Citizens Advice Consumer Service.
- 4.8 Both Denbighshire and North Wales Police have entered into a data sharing agreement to facilitate the easy sharing of intelligence between both organisations. The gathering and analysis of intelligence is used to assist in targeting resources when and where needed.
- 4.9 During 2017, as part of a review of the effectiveness of zones, officers consulted with residents of zones. In summary, the outcome of that survey was that some residents were unaware of their zone but most felt that some deterrent was needed. The survey is attached at Appendix 2.
- 4.10 Officers are proposing that current zones will remain as they are but future applicants for a zone will be provided with a self-help toolkit which will guide residents through establishing a zone without involvement from Denbighshire or North Wales Police. The

toolkit will contain guidance and template documents for consultation, voting, launch, evaluation all of which will make it a simple process of setup.

- 4.11 Officers are further proposing that the cost for street signage for the zone should be borne by residents of that zone, although it is possible for the Council to facilitate that process by identifying businesses that could supply and fit signage. However, Denbighshire's Planning & Public Protection service, through its Trading Standards team, and North Wales Police will continue to jointly fund and make available to householders the Cold Calling door/window stickers (Appendix 3) and will raise awareness of the issues at Community events as well as through the available media, both proactively and reactively
- 4.12 All new zones will continue to be added to Denbighshire's and Trading Standards Wales' websites once the coordinator has confirmed the zone is established. It is envisaged that the Trading Standards team will periodically contact the coordinator to clarify the zone is still operational.
- 4.13 Information on Denbighshire's website will continue to emphasise the message of "No Cold Calling" where door/window stickers exist and clearly describe the possible sanctions which can be applied to traders who ignore them. Publicity messages will continue to encourage residents to report incidents of cold calling to the specified contact numbers for Trading Standards and / or police. In doing so appropriate action will be taken against the cold caller which may include advice or more formal warnings or, ultimately, prosecution. All reports will also be used for intelligence purposes and may be shared accordingly.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 Resilient Communities: The Council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience.
This work is one aspect of enabling people to be safe in their own homes. It supports them to remain independent for as long as possible.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 Ongoing costs for design and print of door stickers (currently around £750 per 2,000 stickers)
- 6.2 Impact, in terms of resource and cost, on Corporate Communications for media messages would be minimal.
- 6.3 The proposed process would remove the need for street signs; a cost saving of around £200 per sign (for design, manufacture and placement).
- 6.4 The process would also support current ongoing initiatives within the Planning and Public Protection service, these being:-
- Call blocker project – a 3 year project (currently in year two) to support vulnerable adults at home from being targeted by unwanted telephone calls by loaning call blockers;

- Scam Awareness – ongoing work to raise awareness of scams (postal and /or telephone) in the community and how to recognise and support victims.

6.5 This work, together with the initiatives in 6.4 above, supports the wider Denbighshire frameworks/plans such as Safeguarding, Ageing Well and Supporting People. The initiatives have allowed us to work with other professionals – Adult Services, Dementia Friends etc. - to ensure that we provide support to some of our most vulnerable residents.

6.6 There is the potential outcome that contributes to the Economic & Community Ambition Strategy in terms of supporting businesses. Promoting a fairer trading environment enables all businesses to compete and thrive.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1 Changes to the existing No Cold Calling Control Zones will make it easier for residents to access deterrent door stickers and information about prevention of unwanted cold calling. The scheme will be less onerous and more inclusive. Use of websites and social media channels will reduce communication costs and make it easier for residents and businesses to access the information. Removal of signage costs (purchase and erection) will make the measures more sustainable.

7.2 The deterrence of unscrupulous traders will reduce the prevalence of unfinished or poor standard housing repairs and fly tipping of unwanted materials. In turn, the reduction in unscrupulous cold calling and doorstep crime will allow reputable businesses to compete more effectively.

7.3 The full assessment is attached at Appendix 4.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 In 2017 a consultation exercise was carried out in selected No Cold Calling Control Zones and to the wider public through the Denbighshire website.

8.2 The local Community Safety officer for North Wales Police covering Denbighshire has given her support to the proposal to give householders the responsibility for engagement as well as the wide use of door stickers acting as deterrents.

8.3 Officers intend to liaise with Denbighshire's Community Engagement team to identify potential funding opportunities to support individual communities in the setup of new zones.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 The proposal would appear to be less costly while still supporting the stated objectives.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 This is a preventative initiative which involves negligible costs. The risk of not continuing with deterring unscrupulous cold callers can be wide ranging for residents and the authority. Victims of unscrupulous cold callers and doorstep criminals are known to lose confidence and have increased likelihood of longer term issues – health, depression, loneliness – which in turn can lead to long term care needs.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 Although there is a statutory duty to enforce the legislation there is no statutory duty on the council to introduce zones.

11.2 Scrutiny's powers with respect of policy development and review are outlined in Section 7.4.1 of the Council's Constitution. Section 7.15.2 of the Constitution specifies the Committee's designation as the Council's Crime and Disorder Committee in accordance with sections 19 and 20 of the Police and Justice Act 2006.

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