

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE

9 APRIL 2014

46. NOTICE OF MOTION - NO TO NUISANCE CALLS

The Head of Legal and Member Services advised that at the meeting of the Council held on 10 March 2014 (minute 98 refers), the following Notice of Motion proposed by Councillor Stuart Kelly and seconded by Councillor Alan Brighthouse was referred by the Mayor to this Committee for consideration.

'NO' TO NUISANCE CALLS

Council notes:

- (a) the success and popularity of 'No Cold Caller Zones' which have been introduced across Wirral by Trading Standards officers, with support from residents and the Police, and that this work has resulted in the creation of 46 'Neighbourhood/No Cold Calling Zones', which now cover some 900 households;
- (b) that "nuisance" marketing calls and text messages to landlines and mobiles are a growing problem despite the existence of the Telephone Preference Service (TPS), with more than 650 million so-called "silent calls" made every year. These are causing inconvenience and distress, particularly to elderly and vulnerable people.

Council welcomes the 'No to Nuisance Calls' campaign <http://www.no2nuisancecalls.net/about> for more effective regulation of this problem, which seeks to enhance the Information Commissioner's powers to encompass all forms of unsolicited telemarketing contact, increase enforcement activity against transgressors and for there to be a single, simple point of contact for any individual wishing to protect their privacy from unwanted telemarketing calls, texts, and emails.

Council resolves to support the 'No To Nuisance Calls' campaign, to take appropriate steps to promote this campaign via the Trading Standards service and publicity and libraries and other Council buildings and to write to local MPs encouraging them to support the Private Members' Communications (Unsolicited Telephone Calls and Texts) Bill.

In accordance with Standing Order 7 (6), Councillor Kelly was invited to attend the meeting in order for him to be given an opportunity to explain the Motion. In accordance with Standing Order 7 (5), any recommendation from the Committee in relation to the Notice of Motion would be referred to the Council. Any debate at Council should take place upon the recommendation of the Committee and there should be no separate debate upon the Motion itself.

Councillor Kelly referred to the considerable support he had received since submitting his Notice of Motion, which suggested to him that nuisance calls were a

significant and growing problem, which caused inconvenience and distress to many people in all areas.

The Council's Trading Standards Strategic Manager gave an outline of the work being done by Trading Standards Officers, who were acutely aware of the scams associated with tele-sales and the dangers, particularly to vulnerable people of ending up on 'suckers lists' and receiving unwanted home visits. He referred to steps that could be taken to eradicate nuisance calls and highlighted Wirral's participation in a number of national campaigns. He reported also upon a local initiative to utilise call-blocking devices, which was soon to be launched. The devices cost approximately £32 per unit and were a very effective way of stopping the majority of nuisance calls. Although only a limited number were available as part of the initiative, they could be purchased from a number of retail outlets.

In response to comments from Members, the Trading Standards Manager acknowledged that there were often legitimate reasons as to why people called upon members of the public and the measures he had outlined were only to combat those who acted unlawfully or sought to take advantage of vulnerable members of society. In response to further comments, he indicated that Neighbourhood/No Cold Calling Zones were created based on the number of complaints received and intelligence gathered to support action in a particular area. However, although they were very effective and were introduced with support from local residents and Merseyside Police, demand outstripped the resources that were available.

Members expressed concern with regard to the financial implications of supporting the Notice of Motion and suggested that the cost needed to be fully evaluated. In addition, it was more difficult to legislate against and combat nuisance calls that originated outside the UK.

The Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment commented that although his department did not have a significant interaction with vulnerable people, he proposed to discuss the matter of nuisance calls at a senior officer level. He was pleased to explore cross departmental working to get the message across but emphasised that there was no additional funding available for it.

On a motion by Councillor Steve Foulkes and seconded by Councillor Steve Williams, it was –

Resolved –

- (1) That the 'No to Nuisance Calls' campaign be supported, and appropriate steps be taken to promote the campaign via the Trading Standards service and through publicity in libraries and other public buildings.**
- (2) That the report of the Trading Standards Strategic Manager be noted.**
- (3) That the proposal of the Strategic Director for Regeneration and Environment to promote cross Departmental working be supported.**

- (4) That the Committee to be appointed for 2014/2015 be asked to consider how best to address the problem.**
- (5) That the Cabinet be requested to write to local MPs, encouraging them to support the Private Members' Communications (Unsolicited Telephone Calls and Texts) Bill.**